

COMICS FOR GIRLS?
A STUDY OF SHŌJO AND AMERICAN GIRLHOOD CULTURE

A Thesis
by
SARAH KORNFIELD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

May 2009

Major Subject: Communication

COMICS FOR GIRLS?
A STUDY OF SHŌJO AND AMERICAN GIRLHOOD CULTURE

A Thesis

by

SARAH KORNFIELD

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Srividya Ramasubramanian
Committee Members,	Leroy Dorsey
	Anne Morey
Head of Department,	Richard Street

May 2009

Major Subject: Communication

ABSTRACT

Comics for Girls?

A Study of Shōjo and American Girlhood Culture. (May 2009)

Sarah Kornfield, B.A. Wheaton College

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Srividya Ramasubramanian

American entertainment often presents heroines who still conform to the confining stereotypes of passivity, docility, sexual objectification, and ultimate dependence on the hero, offering patriarchal narratives in popular culture. This thesis investigates American girlhood entertainment – a subset of popular culture – in comparison to the newly popular genre of Japanese comics, *shōjo manga*, which also targets a girl audience. By focusing on gender issues – power distribution, agency, and gender roles – and utilizing a mixed methodology of rhetorical and quantitative analysis, my research explores the rhetorical devices and narrative structures that empower or constrain heroines, structure power distributions, and assign gender roles.

To better understand shōjo's recent popularity among teenage girls, this research provides 1) a close critical analysis of shōjo texts to examine the messages and rhetorical devices featured in these narratives, and 2) an analysis of audience reception through a participant survey and an analysis of audience-generated message boards. This research participates in Girlhood Studies, Intercultural Studies, and Narrative Criticism as I analyze narratives that target an American girl audience and enact entertainment

globalization. My analysis suggests that shōjo develops from feminist motives, encourages a pro-feminist reality, and successfully markets itself to an audience of American girls, who form parasocial relationships and wishfully identify with the heroines because of their empowered characteristics and the portrayal of equality within romantic relationships.

DEDICATION

For Leaf – and those like her – courageous, individualized, selfless and whimsical in the face of darkness, judgment, and misunderstanding. For my heroines, real and otherwise, who make sense of this world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Srividya Ramasubramanian whose patience, careful consideration, and thoughtful guidance supported and directed this research. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Leroy Dorsey and Dr. Anne Morey for their insight and guidance.

I also need to thank Brad, my friend and colleague, who rescued me when the numbers and databases turned against me. And Kristin, who let me think aloud and offered intelligent considerations accompanied with a cup of coffee.

Finally, I offer my thanks to the A-kon administrators, Laura and Meri, who kindly opened their listserves to my research, facilitating the audience survey portion of this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SHŌJO?.....	1
Shōjo Manga: An Overview.....	2
Focus of Present Study.....	2
Shōjo in Connection to Girlhood Theories	4
Shōjo in Connection to Intercultural Theories	4
Shōjo Manga's Historical and Cultural Context	5
Manga Genres and Gender Role Stereotypes.....	8
Justification for Text Selection	10
Organization and Scope of Thesis Project	12
II AMERICAN GIRLHOOD ENTERTAINMENT.....	16
Common Girlhood Entertainment Themes	16
Exploration of Sexuality and Dating.....	17
Patriarchal Hierarchies	21
Inscribed Femininity – Body Sculpting	23
Girl Power: Mean Girls	25
Consumerism: Fandom & Girlhood	28
American Mainstream Entertainment and Shōjo Manga	30
Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment	31
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	35
<i>Kim Possible</i>	43
<i>Twilight</i>	49

CHAPTER		Page
	Fantasy Texts as Feminist(?).....	55
	Research Questions	58
III	METHODOLOGY	60
	Feminism: Power and Agency	60
	Feminism: Gender Performance.....	61
	Narrative Criticism	62
	Comics as Narrative	63
	Archetypes and Narratives	65
	Audience Reception of Feminist Texts	66
	Wishful Identification	67
	Parasocial Relationships.....	69
	Audience Survey	71
	Audience-Generated Message Boards	76
IV	SHŌJO'S MASTER NARRATIVE.....	78
	Overview of Texts	80
	Portrait of the Pro-Social Heroine	82
	Pro-sociality	82
	The Every-Girl Heroine.....	86
	Range of Control	88
	Heroine's Tragic Past	90
	Bi-Gendered Heroines.....	91
	Cross-Cultural Archetypes	92
	Feminist Narrative Structure	93
	Power Distribution	94
	Love-Triangles: Agency in Action.....	98
	Autonomy and Absent Parents	98
	Equitable Love	101
	Limitations and Areas for Improvement	102
	Sexually Objectified Men.....	102
	Femme Fatales and <i>Kawaii</i> Heroines	103
	Stereotypical Strengths.....	103
	A Feminist Master Narrative.....	104
V	GENDER BENDERS AND AMERICAN GIRLHOOD.....	106
	Contextualizing Gender Benders.....	107
	Gender Bending and the Japanese.....	109
	Gender Bending in Western Literary Consciousness.....	110

CHAPTER	Page
Brief Summary of Texts	114
Analysis of Gender Benders	115
Recurring Features within Gender Benders	117
Significant Differences within Gender Benders	128
Conclusion and Discussion	138
VI SHŌJO AUDIENCE ANALYSIS	142
Shōjo Survey Results	142
Indices Created	143
Survey Results	145
Discussion of Survey Results	155
Open Ended Responses	160
Identification	161
Coherence	163
Fidelity	164
Message Board Analysis	165
Parasocial Relationships	167
Wishful Identification	172
Heroine's Agency and Pro-Sociality	172
Gender Transcendence	175
Conclusion	177
VII CONCLUSIONS	179
Three Analytical Endeavors	179
The Shōjo Master Narrative	180
Gender Bender Analysis	181
Audience Analysis	184
Theoretical Implications	186
Girlhood Studies	187
Intercultural Studies	189
Audience Reception	190
Limitations	191
Concluding Remarks	195
WORKS CITED	197
APPENDIX A: SURVEY FIGURES	210
APPENDIX B: CHARACTER CHARTS	217

	Page
VITA	219

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		Page
1	Sacrificial Heroine.....	83
2	Heroines Value Life	84
3	Disadvantaged Heroine	87
4	Emotionally Stunted Heroes.....	95
5	Fainting Heroines	97
6	Love Triangles.....	99
7	Cross-Cross-Dressing.....	120
8	Gender Revealed	122
9	Rape Threat	125
10	Masculine Rescue.....	126
11	Man Lessons.....	130
12	Androgynous Heroines.....	133
13	Sexy Heroes.....	136
14	True Gender.....	137
15	Preference for Shojo.....	153
16	Detailed Comparison of Shōjo to General Girlhood Entertainment	159

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		Page
1	Texts and Their Genres	13
2	Fantasy Texts and Feminism.....	57
3	New Variables	146
4	Significant Variables	147
5	Comparison of Analyzed and Unanalyzed Heroines	156

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SHŌJO?

Numerous heroines have graced American popular culture with their presence, but few escape the confining stereotypes of passivity, docility, sexual objectification, and ultimate dependence on the hero. This is especially true in comic books, where Superman eternally rescues Lois Lane, not to mention America, and even attempts such as *Wonder Woman*, which strive for positive female representations, become hopelessly entangled in sexual objectification and domination by the male characters. In American comics, “the primary function served by women was to resist the romantic advances of the superhero’s alter-ego, pine for the superhero, scheme to get close to him, screw things up, get captured by the bad guy, and await rescue by the hero, who usually scolded her for being so bold in the first place” (Wright 184-185). The American comic book industry, lead by Marvel and DC Comics, never managed to capture a large female audience, in part due to their failure to create heroines with whom female readers could identify. However, recently imported Japanese comics, known as *manga* and their related animated TV series, *anime*, have successfully captured a female American readership. Manga/anime has various genres, one of which *shōjo* (girly) is marketed exclusively to female audiences and has achieved surprisingly strong readership in the United States.

This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Popular Culture*.

Shōjo Manga: An Overview

Shōjo, a genre of manga created exclusively by female artists for a female audience, portrays dynamic heroines in complex situations with whom readers can identify. The heroines have mottos such as “Tohru Honda never gives up!” (*Fruits Basket*) which emphasize their boldness and determination while they maintain an “every-girl” persona that appeals to the audience. Shōjo manga offers narratives of feminist liberation and cross-cultural, pro-social values in an exciting, entertaining format.

Shojo manga is beginning to flood the American market, as bookstores feature this genre with increasing boldness, marketing to teenage girls, hoping for the kind of ubiquitous presence Hello Kitty® has achieved with younger girls. The American book industry enjoys a prominent and well sustained financial situation within the American economy, but with the stiff competition from other entertainment industries such as movies, videogames, and the internet, business growth in the book industry is difficult (Masters 2006). However, manga sales, especially shōjo manga which targets an entirely female audience, tripled from 2003 to 2006, and major publishing houses are anxious to meet the growing demands for this unusual commodity (Masters 2006).

Focus of Present Study

Intrigued by shōjo’s popularity with American girls and by the underlying messages and reoccurring plot devices featured in shōjo, my research will carefully analyze this genre in connection with the broader culture of American girlhood. Specifically, the present study will a) offer a close critical analysis of shōjo texts to

examine the messages and rhetorical devices featured in these narratives, and b) perform an analysis of audience reception through a participant survey and an analysis of audience-generated message boards. Given the rarity of successfully feminist works in popular culture, and the incredible (and surprising) growth of this genre within the American market, shōjo deserves rhetorical analysis to ascertain how it conveys its messages, the nature and quality of the messages, and the constraints or areas for improvement in this genre. These are feminist texts in the most unlikely area of popular culture – comic books – and they are one of the fastest growing publishing markets in the U.S. (Masters 2006).

Although feminist texts have had a place within American girlhood culture since at least the 1970s¹ in various levels of success, feminism in American comics is virtually unheard of, and certainly unsuccessful at the level of popularity shōjo manga has achieved in the U.S. This is likely due to cultural, historical, economic, and social constraints which comprise the rhetorical situation that shaped both American and Japanese comic industries. My analysis suggests that these texts develop from deeply feminist motives, encourage a pro-feminist reality, and successfully markets itself to American girl culture because of its empowered heroines and portrayal of equality within romantic relationships. Shōjo artists create rich texts combining visual artistry, narrative, dialogue, and cultural elements as they target female readers with essentially feminist messages.

¹Consider novels such as *My Secret Garden* (1973) by Nancy Friday, Judy Bloom's *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret* (1970) and Bette Greene's *Summer of My German Soldier* (1973).

Shōjo in Connection to Girlhood Theories

Thanks to the research conducted by feminist scholars such as Angela McRobbie and Sharon Mazzarella who combine feminist and cultural theories to focus on the culture of teenage girls and paved the way for significant scholarship on girlhood, this research is situated within the context of girlhood theories. Girlhood theories are feminist cultural studies which focus on the development, nature, and implications of girl culture (Mazzarella, Pecora 1). This research is focused on the development of shōjo manga within the American girl culture, its nature – its messages and rhetorical devices, and its implications – its effects upon American girl culture.

Shōjo in Connection to Intercultural Theories

Since shōjo manga is an intercultural text – originating in Japan and imported to the American market – this research also touches on important issues of intercultural entertainment globalization. Manga is hardly unique in its intercultural nature as entertainment is increasingly created for a global market, “television programs are increasingly hybrid, embedded with signs and symbols with transregional appeal, and executed in line with the imperative of market expansion” (Kraidy 99).

As Marwan Kraidy discusses in his work, *Hybridity: or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*, these intercultural entertainment texts create hybrid cultures which continuously mature through adaptation, transformation, and a renewal of the local culture (Kraidy 16). This approach suggests a heterogeneous globalization as local cultures maintain their own structure while consuming global entertainment. This conceptualization of cultural hybridity acknowledges the impossibility of an

“independent cultural identity: every identity must define and position itself in relation to the cultural frames affirmed by the world-system” (Ang 145), but suggests that since meanings are distributed in an uneven cultural flow, “meanings aren’t equally distributed across space, and individuals are reflexive, so they interpret the meanings differently from each other,” thereby local cultures can maintain their integrity as they hybridize with the cultures privileged in global entertainment (Couldry 43). Any responsible analysis of shōjo manga within the American girlhood context must also address its Japanese cultural origins and the cultural hybridization occurring as these Japanese texts flourish within the American local culture.

Given the complex history and development of manga within both the Japanese and American cultures, and its intricate involvement with both girlhood culture and intercultural globalization, a brief, but thorough review of manga’s development is necessary to situate shōjo manga within its international, multicultural context.

Shōjo Manga’s Historical & Cultural Context

Japanese and American comics have a reciprocally stimulating relationship. Each nation developed its own comic tradition and then impacted the other at crucial moments of cultural, artistic, and technological development. By briefly reviewing the development of comics in America and then the development of comics in Japan and finally the intermixing of the two, we can better understand shōjo’s current presence in American popular culture.

In America, comic books started modestly as newspaper comics, the “funnies” published on Sundays. These newspaper funnies were the original site where narrative,

text, sequential illustration, and aesthetic vocabulary combined, forming the medium or genre known as comics. However, these newspaper comics targeted adult audiences and rarely had developed plots; their offshoot, comic books, target younger audiences, with fully developed plots, typically centering around a (super)heroic figure (Wright xiii-xiv). At the close of what became nostalgically known as the golden age of comic books, “the late 1930s, marked by the advent of Superman and his earliest imitators, through the deluge of costumed crimefighters and into the late 1940s,” post World War II American G.I.s introduced their golden age comic books to Japan during the occupation (Goulart 43, Patten 234). After the war, the American comic book industry suffered major setbacks: in the 1950s, the cold war caused numerous social constraints and eventually legislation that overregulated the comic book industry, forcing it to forsake its teenage audience and develop children’s material. By 1955, most households had televisions and Hollywood targeted the teen audience, effectively trapping the American comic book industry with a children-only audience (Wright 179).

However, comic books had a life of their own once introduced to Japan, which has a long history of visual arts, particularly of painted scrolls, woodcuts, and picture books. Comic books exploded in this pictocentric culture and have developed into the ubiquitous presence of *manga* (comic books/graphic novels) and *anime* (animated TV programs/movies) (Napier 21). While comic books declined in America post World War II, they flourished in Japan. Japanese artists merged comic books with their existent visual art forms and cultural style, creating narrative formats and artistry wholly

unlike the American tradition. Moreover, Japan developed very few industry regulations and artists targeted a broad audience of children, teens, and adults.

In Japan, manga has permeated all levels of society, even academia, “since manga are read by nearly all ages and classes of [Japanese] people today, references to them permeate Japanese intellectual life at the highest levels, and they are increasingly influencing serious art and literature” (Schodt *Dreamland* 21). Since adults, teens, children, males, and females all purchase manga, the manga magazines have exceptionally high circulation rates: the top manga magazine, *Shonen Jump* has a weekly circulation between five and six million (Schodt *Dreamland* 88).

American TV networks first imported Japanese animation in the 1960s (*Astro Boy*), and Japanese animation made a splash in the late 1970s when American teenage boys already reading American comic books discovered the teen oriented transformer/robot dramas in Japanese animation. Due to difficulties in translating manga, the first manga was introduced in 1986 – more than twenty years after anime had debuted on American television. The original American fans of manga were comic book, science-fiction, and/or fantasy consumers and the first anime/manga conventions were held in connection with established comic book and sci-fi conventions (Patten 57). The American book industry maintains this connection by locating manga with comic books in the aisle next to sci-fi/fantasy in mainstream bookstores such as Barnes&Nobles® and Borders®. Manga within the American market maintains its distinct Japanese nature and cultural elements, which are a source of its marketability, and the majority of manga is published “Japanese Style:” readers begin at the “back” of

the book, reading the dialogue bubbles sequentially right to left and ending at the “front” of the book.

Manga Genres and Gender Role Stereotypes

Manga has a wide range of genres including action, horror, historical fiction, pornography, sci-fi, fantasy, romance, children’s stories, and philosophical musings. However, most manga is broadly categorized as *shōjo* (manga for girls) or *shonen* (manga for boys). While some fluidity exists between these categories as artists attempt to reach the largest audience possible, incorporating *shōjo* characteristics into predominantly action based, *shonen* stories, there remains a basic divide between what the manga industry markets to males and females. *Shōjo* was originally created by the same men who customarily wrote *shonen* (boy’s manga). Hence, the original *shōjo* narratives featured negative stereotypes of women: tragic heroines, orphaned princesses, and passive women, stories that reinforce the neo-Confucianistic society in which they were published (Shiokawa 99).

Japan had clearly delineated gender roles which prevented women from engaging in the public sphere; however this experienced significant change during World War II, first when women went to work to support the war effort, and then during the U.S. occupation when women received the right to vote in 1945. Despite significant improvements, gender roles remain fairly restrictive in Japan, especially in the work place: Japanese corporations operate on a “Two-Track System” in which men are hired to a managerial track starting at a reasonable salary and equally qualified women are

hired to a clerical track where they are rarely paid living wages, have little-to-no chance of promotion, and few chances for pay increases (Ogasawara 28-29).

In the post war era, female artists, drawn by the independence and living wages that a manga career could provide, broke into this male dominated arena by arguing that women could create better stories for women and increase shōjo sales (Schodt *Manga* 97). These female artists developed their own stories and transformed shōjo by changing the themes, subject matter, settings, and most importantly the characteristics of the female protagonist (Shiokawa 100). The previously passive heroines became more tenacious characters. Shōjo now incorporates career oriented stories, although it still defines itself by romantic narratives (Shiokawa 104). Modern shōjo usually tells girls' coming-of-age stories, focusing on everyday life: the heroines attend school, play sports, and do chores. The heroines also embody traditionally "masculine" character traits: determination, loyalty, bravery, independence, and creativity, yet they behave in a hyper-feminine manner. The heroines merge their "masculine" character traits with traditional "femininity" to create a hybrid gender: girls with the power and agency of "masculinity" and the emotional nature and mannerisms of "femininity" (Napier 162-165).

Shōjo has made substantial headway into the American market and has a large female readership – something American comics never achieved. Starting in July 2005, VIZmedia – owned by three of the largest Japanese owners and licensors of manga – published *Shojo Beat*, the leading shōjo manga magazine in America, a 300+ page, monthly magazine appealing to "passionate young women driven by drama and inspired

by creative expression” (*Shojo Beat Media Kit*). According to their media kit, *Shojo Beat* had a 2007 Circulation Base of 38,000, a total average circulation of 42,807, and an estimated readership of 128,421. Based on reader surveys, *Shojo Beat* announced that 94% of their readers are female, 47% are between the ages of 12-17 and 45% are between the ages of 18-34. Moreover, 83% of their readers watch anime and 76% play video games on a weekly basis (*Shojo Beat Media Kit*).²

Since shōjo entered American popular culture after shonen (boys) anime and manga, via the male dominated sci-fi and comic book realms, it is unsurprising that shōjo’s primary American readers are disenfranchised female gamers and sci-fi enthusiasts. American genres had little to offer these women who are “intrigued with alternative cultures and new technology,” but shōjo meets these entertainment needs with rich narratives, provocative characters, and essentially feminist stories (*Shojo Beat Media Kit*). Shōjo is beginning to appeal to a wider, less niche audience, as evidenced by its proliferation in bookstores and theatrical releases such as Hayao Miyazaki’s shōjo film, *Spirited Away*, which received an Oscar for Best Animated Feature in 2003, beating the American blockbuster *Ice Age*.

Justification for Text Selection

In order to understand the increasing popularity of shōjo manga within American girl culture, I will analyze six works, selected because of their current popularity and representative nature. The first text, *Fruits Basket*, written by Natsuki Takaya and

² I attempted to find publication information for the texts I analyze and for this magazine, but Viz Media does not make their publication and sales information available to the public, and even inquiries made directly to their publication department yielded no information. However, we can infer from the genre’s growth in book-store-aisles, fan-based conventions, and increasing availability of anime movies in local theaters that this genre is indeed growing.

published by Tokyopop, advertises itself as the #1 selling shōjo manga in America. *Vampire Knight* and *Absolute Boyfriend* by Matsu Hino and Yuu Watase, respectively, were featured in the February 2008 issue of *Shojo Beat*, the leading American shōjo manga magazine, published by Viz Media. Both of these authors write prolifically and enjoy enduring popularity in the shōjo genre. *Sand Chronicles* and *Backstage Prince* are authored by increasingly popular artists, Hinako Ashihara and Kanoko Sakurakoji, respectively, and are also serialized in *Shōjo Beat*. Finally, I selected a second work by Yuu Watase, *Imadoki!*, which was published by Viz Media (which produces *Shōjo Beat*) but was never serialized in the magazine. These texts are popular and representative of the shōjo genre and will form the basis of my analysis of shōjo.

Within the shōjo genre, most series feature a master narrative of a high school girl who is relatively disadvantaged in relation to other characters and has experienced deep personal loss, but who exercises substantial personal agency and ultimately rescues the hero. However, shōjo has several subgenres which maintain the same basic master narrative but alter the gender relations.³ Of particular interest is the *Gender Bender* subgenre, which features heterosexual romances where one (or more) of the protagonists cross-dress. Through analyzing this shōjo subgenre, we can better understand the portrayal of gender roles in this newly popular girlhood entertainment. In my focused analysis on *Gender Benders*, I selected three representative and popular texts: *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*. These texts are all best selling Gender Benders within the American market and were all published by VIZ Media – one

³ Other shōjo subgenres include *Yaoi* and *Boy-Love*, both of which feature two male protagonists enacting a homosexual romance.

of the leading importers of Japanese manga (Kelts 20). Moreover, they demonstrate different approaches to cross-dressing which becomes important in the analysis of gender construction and performance.

In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki (female) chooses to cross-dress, in *W Juliet* Makoto (male) seizes it as his only chance to pursue an acting career, and in *Ouran Host Club* Haruhi (female) is forced to cross-dress; these different impetuses create three very different approaches to cross-dressing and different relationships between the cross-dresser and her/his transgendered persona. These three texts will form the primary material for my analysis of *Gender Benders*, as I consider issues of gender construction and identity, evaluating the messages and rhetorical methods at work in these texts. Table 1 lists the texts and their respective heroines grouped according to their genre/sub-genre.

Organization and Scope of Thesis Project

Since different cultures center around different myths, heroes, and values studying an intercultural text offers the opportunity to analyze different portrayals of gender relations and to examine why these different portrayals are accepted into the local culture. This research will focus on portrayals of gender relations in the genre of shōjo manga and in its subgenre, *Gender Benders* – in which one or more of the protagonists cross-dresses. The goals for this research are to a) examine the messages and rhetorical devices of shōjo manga and its sub-genre *Gender Benders* in an attempt to theorize as to why and how these Japanese texts are integrated into American girl culture, and b) establish their reception and theorize as to their effects upon American girl culture.

Table 1: Texts and Their Genres⁴

Genre/Sub-Genre	Series	Heroine
Shōjo Manga: these texts are representative of the master narratives dominant in this genre.	<i>Fruits Basket</i> (2004-current)	Tohru Honda
	<i>Vampire Knight</i> (2007-current)	Yuuki Cross
	<i>Absolute Boyfriend</i> (2006-current)	Riiko Izawa
	<i>Sand Chronicles</i> (2008-current)	Ann Uekusa
	<i>Backstage Prince</i> (2007)	Akari
	<i>Imadoki!</i> (2004-2005)	Tampopo Yamazaki
Gender Benders: a subset of shōjo manga which feature cross-dressed protagonists involved in heterosexual romance.	<i>Hana-Kimi</i> (2004-2008)	Mizuki
	<i>W Juliet</i> (2004-2007)	Ito (Heroine); Makoto (Hero)
	<i>Ouran High School Host Club</i> (2005-current)	Haruhi

⁴ These dates represent their publication in America, all of these series have been previously published in completion in Japan.

This first chapter was first devoted to a general introduction to the topic of shōjo manga, its situation within girlhood studies and intercultural globalization, and a necessary overview of shōjo and gender benders' history in both Japan and America to establish the context of these texts.

The second chapter will discuss the current nature of American girlhood culture by exploring the common themes within American girlhood media. This will provide a basic comparison between the prominent American entertainment targeting girls and shōjo manga. Then I will explore the themes in American fantasy entertainment which targets American girls. In so doing, I will focus on the American texts that are most similar to shōjo manga, providing a thematic comparison.

The third chapter discusses the methodologies for both a close critical analysis of shōjo manga and the audience survey and message board analysis. This chapter provides the theoretical under-girding of both gendered and feminist theory and how they inform my textual analysis, the methodological approach of narrative theory, and the media theories of Wishful Identification and Parasocial Relationships which inform my audience survey and message board analysis.

The fourth chapter is an analysis of the master narrative of shōjo manga. Within the genre of shōjo manga, the same basic narrative asserts itself over a variety of individual texts, establishing reoccurring plot devices, character tropes, and nearly identical heroines. In order to understand the increasing popularity of shōjo manga within American girl culture, I will analyze six works, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, *Absolute Boyfriend*, *Sand Chronicles*, *Backstage Prince*, and *Imadoki!*, selected because

of their popularity and representative nature. This chapter will focus on examining the rhetorical devices and the dominating messages within the genre of shōjo manga.

In the fifth chapter, I will focus on gender construction in *Gender Benders*, a subgenre of shōjo manga. My analysis will feature standard shōjo manga Gender Benders, such as the series *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*. Through a close reading of these texts informed by Gender and Feminist theories, I will consider the nature of these texts' messages, the successfulness of their rhetorical methods, and their implications for American girl culture.

The sixth chapter will conclude this research with an examination of the results of audience surveys I conducted with American audience members and an analysis of audience-generated message boards. This research component brings the voices of American girls into academia as they reflect on the shōjo genre, its messages and effects.

The final chapter will reconsider my three analytical endeavors (chapters IV, V, and VI), offering succinct answers to my research questions, consider the theoretical implications of this research, point to the limitations of this research and areas for future study pertaining to girlhood entertainment, shōjo, and gender portrayals, and offer concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN GIRLHOOD ENTERTAINMENT

Girlhood is a nebulous term; in its expanded definition it incorporates females from the age range of eight to twenty-one and refers to a culture of physical, emotional, and relational change. By synthesizing the current communication scholarship on girlhood media we can better understand the cultural milieu that shōjo manga has entered. I will first provide an overview of the dominant themes in the broad genre of American mainstream girlhood entertainment. After establishing these themes, I will focus on the subgenre of fantasy entertainment in order to compare shōjo manga to its most similar American counterpart.

Shōjo manga exists as an entertainment alternative to American mainstream girlhood entertainment and to understand its reception we must first explore the dominant themes in mainstream texts. I will synthesize American girlhood texts by five organizing themes: 1) exploration of sexuality and dating, 2) patriarchal hierarchies, 3) inscribed femininity – body sculpting, 4) Girl Power/Mean Girls, and 5) consumerism; these themes recurrently surface in girlhood texts across genres.

Common Girlhood Entertainment Themes

Girlhood texts are those products of popular culture that “‘instructs’ girls on how to become women” (Mazzarella 3). Media girlhood texts are prescriptive and definitive. Before delving into an analysis of the themes structuring girlhood texts and their coverage in girlhood studies, I will briefly describe the types of media studied as girlhood texts. *Teen TV* is perhaps the most ambiguous of girlhood genres, as it

encompasses “a surprisingly wide range of texts as part of the shifting discursive rubric of Teen TV, from programs nominally about teens but directed at older audiences to programs not defined as teen but featuring teen characters, themes, and concerns” (Ross, Stein 5-6). Teen TV texts are perhaps best exemplified by television shows such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Dawson’s Creek*, but also include shows with adult casts, such as *Grey’s Anatomy*, which draw a girl-aged audience. Similarly girlhood novels are marketed towards younger females and usually, but not always, feature girl-aged protagonists. Other commonly studied genres of girlhood texts, such as fashion, magazines, the internet, and consumerism usually focus on explicitly girl-aged content and girl audiences as this research details how these media representations construct girlhood.

Exploration of Sexuality and Dating

From the 1970s forward, many texts targeting adolescent girls have focused on issues of sexuality and puberty. This trend coincides with the feminist movements of this era, focusing on sexual liberation and expression. In an article, *Becoming a Woman in the 1970s*, Amy Bowles-Reyer focused on sexual maturation in her analysis of popular girlhood books such as Norma Klein’s *It’s Not What You Expect* (1973), Judy Bloom’s *Forever* (1975) and *Are you there God? It’s Me, Margaret* (1970), which has “sold more than 80 million books” since its first publication in 1970 (Carpenter 2008), and continues to find resonance with girlhood culture making *Time* magazine’s list of 100 best English novels in 2005 (Grossman 2005). This emphasis offered a new conceptualization of sexuality, empowering girls “by validating that they can and should

have sexual feelings and providing them with a language to express their sexuality” (Bowles-Reyer 22). However, as Bowles-Reyer discovered in her analysis, this typical girlhood “coming-of-age” story situates the female protagonist “in a state of confusion and entrenched in a complicated process of self-awareness that is not yet resolved by the end of the novel” (Bowles-Reyer 23).

Girlhood media is a genre that increasingly acknowledges and accepts female sexuality, yet often shrouds it in an uncomfortable cloud of confusion and ambiguity. As if with the mere admission of female sexuality, it can then relegate the topic to background unimportance. Working in concert with this admission and yet relegation of female sexuality are the disturbing messages concerning body image and body construction. In an article entitled, “The Body of Evidence,” Mary Bently traces how American girls are transformed by our culture from precocious, adventurous children into passive, self-degrading teenagers obsessed with physical appearance and controlling their own bodies – which manifests in dieting and extreme weight loss. In analyzing media portrayals of the female body from television heroines to department store mannequins, Bently comments that “from these many sources girls begin to understand the implications of power, prestige, wealth, and male attention that are bestowed on women who are culturally defined as ‘attractive.’ Consequently, their value is measured by physical attraction” (Bently 211).

This issue of physicality begins to inscribe the notion of sexuality, tying the concepts together into a conglomerate notion in which beauty equals sexuality. This conflates notions of sexuality with patriarchal establishments of beauty, so that girls

physically “transform themselves into the role of the feminine in our culture, which means being nice, sweet, pretty, and thin. These are the things that we have come to know as ‘feminine.’ These are also the characteristics that make it difficult for girls to be agents on their own behalf as they perpetuate objectification and passivity” (Bentley 214). Hence, the media targeting American girls redefines female sexuality in terms of passivity and physical objectification.

Female sexuality is further problematized in the media’s construction of girlhood by the sheer lack of appropriate terminology. After listing sexualized advertisements and detailing the vast amount of *body* on display in the media, women’s studies scholar Joan Brumberg states in *The Body Project*,

Despite this national preoccupation with sex and the body, there is still a deeply embedded cultural reluctance, even in supposedly “enlightened” circles, to talk honestly or openly about certain aspects of the female body ... women still struggle to find a vocabulary that does not rely on Victorian euphemisms, medical nomenclature, or misogynistic slang. [Brumberg xxxi]

This limitation – stemming from Victorian conceptualizations of the adolescent girl as sacred, pure, and asexual – forces girls and girlhood texts attempting to discuss female sexuality to reinforce negative terminology that inherently restricts and suppresses female sexuality (Brumberg 143).

As girlhood texts define, portray, and explore sexuality, they do so in a contextualization of danger, “middle-class girls of ten and eleven are socialized into a world where sexuality is regarded as absolutely normal but also rather perilous [abuse, transmitted diseases, pregnancy]” (Brumberg 142). Consider the recent ABC Family Original Series, *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (2008-), this TV show opens

on a 15-year-old girl hiding in the bathroom taking a pregnancy test (which is positive) while her conservative and unaware mother ironically lectures her from the kitchen about how she ought to be having fun during her youth. The message is clear: this girl has been having too much fun and will pay for her dangerous exploration of sexuality with a pregnancy (*Secret Life*).

Girlhood texts have significantly improved as demonstrated by the mere attempt to conceptualize female sexuality and to explore iterations of female desire. However, these attempts often fall into patriarchal patterns of restriction and suppression, dependant on negative terminology, negatively sexualizing young girls, and unable to helpfully portray the physical and emotional changes that take place during girlhood as females develop and explore their sexuality.

Closely related to issues of sexuality are the common themes of dating and social interaction in girlhood media. In reviewing the popular books targeting adolescent females, such as the *Nancy Drew on Campus* series the *Sweet Valley University* series, Norma Pecora found this entertainment deals explicitly with romantic motifs in the college/university setting. In her analysis, Pecora stated that “these books suggest that dating and social alienation are the central plot in the day-to-day lives of college women, while interviews with freshmen girls at a Midwestern state college indicate that their experiences are much more complex and multidimensional” (Pecora 49). This analysis suggests that popular girlhood media reduces the complexity that developing girls experience into two intertwined categories of dating and social interaction. This reduction limits the possibilities and spheres of expression available to girls.

Further communication research by Jennifer Scanlon (1998) reveals that many cultural products targeting American girls actually assert the cultural necessity of a boyfriend for girls to be complete. In a critique of popular board games of the 1990s (such as *Heart Throb: the Dream Date Game* and *Sweet Valley High: Can You Find a Boyfriend in Time for the Big Date?*) which target female adolescents, Scanlon remarks, “by playing these board games, girls learn a central rule: they need boys to complete their self-definition” (Scanlon 188). Dating relationships as portrayed in girlhood media are rarely equitable, mutually supportive, or beneficial.

Patriarchal Hierarchies

Popular media has progressed to a state where it regularly features female heroines in relatively empowered positions – women can now be CEOs, spies, and supernaturally gifted in novels and TV programs. However, these narratives typically reconstruct patriarchal hierarchies even while developing seemingly self-sufficient heroines. This is a widespread phenomenon that is particularly disturbing because producers and critics alike often point to these self-sufficient heroines as the culmination of feminism in popular culture and overlook the reiterations of patriarchy, the heroines’ complicity in patriarchy, and dependence on patriarchal figures. For example, films like the *Charlie’s Angels* remake (2000) starring Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore, and Lucy Liu, and TV shows such *Alias*, feature strong, seemingly independent heroines.

However, these heroines fit into and affirm patriarchal hierarchies: The Angels work for a man so god-like the Angels only hear his voice, and Sidney (from *Alias*) works for three tyrannical men (one of which is her father), dates her espionage handler,

and spends her life deciphering prophetic devices created by a man, which foretell her life. Unfortunately, these narratives are celebrated as feminist texts. bell hooks, a feminist theorist, commented on how these seemingly empowered female characters actually affirm patriarchy in a *New York Times* article, “the female protagonists who engage in physical combat in popular movies, television programs and video games encourage woman not to challenge patriarchy” (qtd. in Marriot).

In an analysis of these seemingly independent and powerful heroines Sara Crosby explicates the reestablishment of patriarchal order in her article “The Cruellest Season: Female Heroes Snapped into Sacrificial Heroines” (2004). In analyzing Teen TV programs such as *Dark Angel* and *Alias* – shows which cultivated a girlhood audience, Crosby determined that these heroines undergo a “drastic snap” in which, through self-sacrifice, the heroines experience the erasure of female agency. To reach this obliterating stage, “[the heroines] must assume three fundamental ‘truths’ about themselves and their communities” (Crosby 155). These three truths re-inscribe patriarchal order upon these powerful females: first, the heroines assume a burden of guilt for their success – “tough female heroes feel guilt *because of* their heroism. Their agency, their toughness is their sin” (Crosby 155); secondly, the heroines want to give up their agency because it is at odds with their (feminine) nature; and thirdly, the heroines want to rejoin “normal community” and the only stable community to rejoin is the patriarchal community (Crosby 155). Ultimately, media situates female heroines within patriarchal order and the heroines (eventually) reaffirm this patriarchy.

American popular culture is progressing – we now have strong, fierce, self-sufficient representations of women – yet this progress is deeply troubled. Self-sufficient heroines can rarely stand alone, and are, instead, situated in limiting patriarchal hierarchies.

Inscribed Femininity – Body Sculpting

Building on the conceptualization of gender as a performance – in which males and females enact social and cultural ritualizes which connote gender (Butler 139, Sloop 6, Goffman 64, 66), girlhood theorists argue that girlhood media constructs gender through their representation of stereotypical gender performances. This is particularly influential for girl-aged audiences since the “differences between adolescent girls and boys (in terms of behaviors, attitudes, and attributes) increase with age due to increased socialization pressure to conform to traditional feminine and masculine gender roles” (Walsh and Ward 133). Girlhood is an intense time of physical and emotional change during which the girls are increasingly exposed to and aware of gender roles and norms. Although adolescents have many sources of gender information and modeling (parents, peers, role models, authority figures, etc), “the messages from media may be especially consistent, ubiquitous, and frequent. Media exposure may affect young people’s gender schemas both by defining what is normative and what is ideal for women and men” (Walsh and Ward 151).

While the media offers a variety of gender roles and norms to adhere to, a specific model of the physical female body is featured as a key hallmark of femininity. In this aspect, physicality is linked to femininity – not sexuality as discussed earlier. As

the media privileges unusually tall, extraordinarily thin, and large breasted female bodies and inscribes them with femininity – this form becomes prescriptive for girls as they attempt to adhere to female gender norms and roles, “many young girls worry about the contours of their bodies – especially shape, size, and muscle tone – because they believe that the body is the ultimate expression of the [feminine] self” (Brumberg 97). Many girls are committed to extreme body sculpting – “feminizing” their bodies through dieting, exercise, and eating disorders. Yet as girls fail to attain the impossible “feminine” body, twentieth century girlhood becomes riddled with a fear of fat, “anxiety about body parts [especially breasts and thighs], and expectations of perfection in the dressing room have all coalesced to make ‘I hate my body’ into a powerful mantra that informs the social and spiritual life of too many American girls” (Brumberg 130).

This “feminine body” functions to inscribe as “feminine” otherwise non-feminine representations of women in the media. As the media responds to feminist critiques by attempting to portray stronger, more assertive, smarter, women outside the home in positions of leadership, they lose many of the standard media stereotypes of femininity: domesticity, emotionality, nurturing, subordinate, etc. Instead these female characters are enacting some traditionally masculine gender traits: professionalism, leadership, boldness, assertiveness, agency, etc. Since these gender roles/norms were strict male/female designations that are now blurred, the female body itself is inscribed with femininity – it must bear the entire weight of gender distinction.

This inscribed femininity which results in body sculpting is captured in the idea of a “supergirl.” In an article entitled “AMAZING +: Driven to Excel; For Girls, It's Be

Yourself, and Be Perfect, Too,” Sara Rimer discusses this merger of masculine and feminine traits in media representations which suggests girls should be masculine (leaders, smart, active), feminine (beautiful, thin, domestic), and ultimately perfect (flawless, confident, efficient), “girls are under enormous pressure to be smart, demonstrate leadership, get into the best college, all while being thin, pretty and wearing expensive jeans” (Rimer 1). Rimer demonstrates this argument with an interview she had with a high school girl named Esther, a fan of *Grey’s Anatomy*,

[Esther] said she admired Cristina, the spunky resident on *Grey’s Anatomy*, “She really stands up for herself and knows who she is, which I aspire to,” Esther said. “Cristina is also ‘gorgeous,’ Esther laughed. “And when she’s taking off her scrubs, she’s always wearing cute lingerie.” [Rimer 1]

Commenting on the above article, girlhood scholars, Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine said,

Christina Yang’s positioning by the girls in the *New York Times* article as the ideal representation of supergirl, as embodying both masculine assertiveness and feminine sexiness, is fascinating. Christina’s character is an emotional cripple who doesn’t cook or clean and is a surgery ‘junkie’ ... but Christina is still slim, sexy, and desirable. Her femininity is emblazoned upon her body through lingerie. The thong, it would seem, is a stand-in for the absent behavioral markers of passivity. [Ringrose and Walkerdine 8]

The female body, sufficiently thin and sexy, reinscribes femininity upon an otherwise unfeminine media character.

Girl Power: Mean Girls

In response to feminist concerns, and in conjunction with feminist progress, girlhood became redefined from a passive, idyllic age focused on romance and anticipating the household concerns of married life, to an active, outwardly focused, vibrant age championed through the phrase, “girl power.” Although girl power has

many iterations, “in popular culture, girl power typically meant girl solidarity and the idea that girls can be powerful actors in their own worlds. Girl power championed the idea that girls were not merely sidekicks to boys or ornamentation until adulthood; rather, girlhood was a time to be celebrated and girls were agents in that celebration” (Sheridan-Rabideau 45). This conceptualization of girl power become hopelessly entangled in consumerism and the music industry – enjoying its first life with the Spice Girls, and now living on in water-downed variations through the Cheetah Girls, and Hannah Montana.

In a brief history of how girl culture had been framed in academic and activist texts, Sheridan-Rabideau traces how girls in the early to mid-1990s were framed as victims. This was the age of intense focus on “unsafe hallways,” eating disorders, etc., summed up in Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia*. This was the framing that girl power meant to transform – to empower girls out of victimage and into agency. Instead, at least in the media, these newly empowered girls became Mean Girls – individuals who “create a culture of manipulation (power + passivity), using relational aggression to hurt others” (Sheridan-Rabideau 41). Mean Girls is the patriarchal answer to Girl Power: the media presents a dystopic actualization of empowered girls – so obviously demonstrated in the movie *Mean Girls*, that lent its title to this media phenomenon.

Girl culture is fractured into this binary opposition: Girl Power vs. Mean Girls which strongly resembles an older binary split: the Virgin vs. Slut paradigm. In both of these binaries, the former often slides into the latter: girl power becomes Mean Girls and Virgins become Sluts. In our culture, these two paradigms work in conjunction creating

false categorical identities: good girls are (or associate as) Virgins and they can champion girl power; meanwhile, bad girls are Sluts and operate as Mean Girls. Once a girl is socially labeled as a “Slut/Mean Girl,” she is socially expelled from the “Virgin/Girl Power” cliques and rarely has a chance to reintegrate. The “oppositional line drawn by the ‘Virgin/Slut’ paradigm that can slice through the girls’ circle of community” is often perpetuated by the boys since the “boyfriends often started the rumors as part of male bravura, exaggerating ‘how far they went’” (Sweeney 25).

Girls are caught in a “time warp of a pernicious conundrum of ‘Do It/Don’t Do It’ and ‘You’re Sexy/You’re a Skank’” (Sweeney 25) as they try to conform to media portrayals of sexuality and girlhood, yet find themselves socially ostracized if they achieve the modeled sexuality. This seems to evoke “a deep rage and hostility in girls, which emerges in the scapegoating of The Slut” (Sweeney 25). Girl culture perpetuates the very binaries which confine it,

That the 1990s begins with the Victim Girl and ends with the Mean Girl in pop psychology demonstrates the contradictory nature of Girl Power in mainstream culture. In this way, the Victim Girl/Mean Girl polarity becomes a new kind of Virgin/Whore paradigm which has subdivided female culture for eons. The reduction to an either/or in the culture at large leaves girls with a rather limited set of choices: Are you a Good Girl (and maybe a Victim) or are you a Bad Girl (and maybe Mean)? [Sweeney, 93]

What began as a consumer-based, music-related attempt at empowerment met a patriarchal backlash which invoked the Virgin/Slut paradigm under the new guise of Girl Power/Mean Girls. Even more disturbingly, in a patriarchal backlash Girl Power is now often coded as Mean Girls, conflating the two images to suggest that powerful girls will become mean. In a triumphant moment of this cultural backlash, a 2005 *Newsweek*

article entitled, “Bad Girls Gone Wild,” written by Julie Scelfo insinuated that the Women’s Movement had gone too far, stating “The women's movement, which explicitly encourages women to assert themselves like men, has unintentionally opened the door to girls' violent behavior” (Scelfo) – ostensibly linking Girl Power with Mean Girls.

Consumerism: Fandom & Girlhood

Consumerism is intricately linked to feminism and girlhood because the marketplace is a key entry point into the public sphere in America’s capitalistic society. Not only does purchasing power command the marketplace, it helps individuals create both personal and group identities: “[consumerism is] an expression of decision making” offered to women, “consumerism created a new set of images by which they could better understand who they were, or at least who they might be” (Sato 16, 19).

This is prevalent in girlhood, as identities are expressed through fashion and consumerism, “popular representations of girl power in the mid-1990s, such as the Spice Girls, depict girls as expressing their agency through consumerism. In these representations, girls gain access to power through their bodies and their credit cards” (Sheridan-Rabideau 7). As girlhood begins to assert its buying power, the market responds accordingly, ““the teen market has exploded in terms of size and direct spending power,’ said Michael Wood, vice president of Teenage Research Unlimited, who estimated that today's teenage population stood at 33.5 million. ‘The fastest growing power is the younger market, 12 to 15, accounting for 50 percent of the overall teen market’” (Seymour).

While consumerism, like materialism, has negative connotations, not all implications are bad. Consumerism allows girls to peruse available identities and create their own as they buy select artifacts, “They get to select and survey a world of identities and selves that are presented out there” (Seymour). This can be empowering as girls create their own identities through their consumerist choices. Also, the market will cater to what girls actually like – so we could see an empowering trend in media as the markets begins to understand what girls are willing to buy.

This consumerist trend to girlhood helps create not only individual identities, but also a broader sense of community, “It's not really about clothes ... At this age it's important for them to feel like they're part of a larger club. And this does it” (Seymour). Girl fans of movies, artists, musicians, TV programs, etc, can find a larger community through consumerism, “community is a big part of any fandom culture ... fans are happy to find they are not alone in their appreciation of the object of their fandom” (Gregson 134). By buying entertainment merchandise, girls can publish their fandom to others and unite with like-minded girls.

However, girlhood and consumerism also has dangerous implications, especially as the market and girls themselves are complicit in the negative themes discussed earlier. As sexuality, impossible beauty ideals, unequal dating relationships, patriarchal hierarchies, and physically inscribed femininity all converge in the market place, “consumer culture ... seduces [girls] into thinking that the body and sexual expression are their most important projects” (Brumberg 25).

Consumerism was and is an important, useful, yet inherently flawed element of feminism, now asserting itself in girlhood culture. The market offers girls a place to create their own identities and to find community with others – yet all too often, limited by the current social structure, girls use the market place to create disempowering identities and communities.

American Mainstream Entertainment and Shōjo Manga

Girlhood is simultaneously a lived experience, a media construction, and a cultural production. The communication scholarship on girlhood has explored the themes of sexuality/dating, patriarchal hierarchies, physically inscribed femininity, Girl Power/Mean Girls, and consumerism. These themes resurface across mediums, texts, and genres, creating a montage of messages – few of which empower girls.

Girlhood, a time of physical, emotional, and relational change, is prescriptively recreated in popular culture as the media reflects real-life experiences and models unattainable versions of girlhood, setting cultural standards for American girls. Ultimately, issues of sexualization, objectified beauty, commoditization, and patriarchy dominate girlhood media, even as texts are improving and attempting to empower girls.

These themes exist in the broad mainstream American media which targets girls as a primary audience. Shōjo manga markets to this same demographic and touches on many of the same themes in these romantic narratives. However, both the broad shōjo genre and its subgenre, *Gender Benders*, offer alternative approaches to these themes, often utilizing rhetorical devices that empower the heroines and provide more equitable gender relations.

Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment

Because of shōjo's international and feminine origins – shōjo is written by Japanese women for a female audience – it differs considerably from mainstream American girlhood media. In order to more productively compare shōjo to American entertainment we should look at a specific subset of American entertainment that most closely parallels shōjo and that shōjo readers are likely to also consume. This is difficult because shōjo is rather unique in its artistic style, character motifs, and narrative structure. Therefore, I have extracted five core elements of the shōjo genre and use these five elements as criteria to select American entertainment that narratively overlaps with shōjo. Therefore, I will explore American entertainment that matches these five elements which dominate shōjo narratives: 1) sequential narratives – books, TV programs, and/or movies that form a series; 2) entertainment which is narrated by or otherwise emphasizes a teen-aged heroine; 3) entertainment which is set in “normal” situations such as high school; 4) entertainment which features supernatural elements and/or includes an element of *otherness* – geographical or cultural exoticism; and 5) entertainment which draws significant narrative tension from romantic developments.

Entertainment texts that contain these five elements and target a young female audience are not overly prevalent in America. However, recently popular fantasy⁵ texts such as the TV programs *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), *Kim Possible* (2002-2007) and the book/movie series *Twilight* (2005-2008) meet these criteria. This notably eliminates popular girlhood texts such as *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007) and *Gossip Girl*

⁵ Texts which meet these five criteria are generally considered part of the *fantasy* genre since they feature vampires, demons, spirit-worlds, aliens, and/or paranormal abilities.

(2007-present), which center on a high-school-aged, female protagonists but significantly lack an element of *otherness*. These American texts focus culturally inward exploring aspects of Americana instead of fantasy or cultural exoticism. These five criteria also eliminate texts such as *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) and *Heroes* (2006-present) which are also popular with American girls but differ from shōjo narratives because they center on male protagonists and/or ensemble casts instead of featuring a sole heroine.

Media have increasingly targeted girl audiences as they developed into a population segment wielding significant spending power.

Nineteen ninety-eight marked a turning point: That year, the film *Titanic* was released to gross over \$600 million (The Movie Times, 2009), largely as a result of multiple viewings by teenage girls. In its wake streamed a plethora of films and television shows aimed at capturing this capricious and suddenly highly desirable audience segment. [Durham 25]

Some media such as books and films target girl audiences directly – persuading girls to buy the novel, DVD, or movie ticket. Other media such as magazines and TV programs target girls less directly – persuading girls to read or watch the product so that they also consume the advertisements. Unlike books and films which profit directly from the girls' purchasing power and therefore focus primarily on appealing to a large audience, magazines and TV programs are funded by the advertisers and must therefore attempt to garner a large audience while creating narratives which support the advertisements.

In order to capture this girlhood audience for capitalist gain, many authors, producers, and directors have begun engaging feminist themes which appeal to girls, offering strong female heroines as the lead protagonist. Many of these texts situate the heroine in an explicit fantasy realm because alternate time frames, alien worlds, and/or

superpowers function as distancing devices which creates space for ideologies (such as feminism) to challenge hegemonic structures.

Texts such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* function in the genre of *Magical Feminism*, which “uses magic elements to specifically explore gender inequity and power for women, modeling a type of empowered female within a realistic world, one step away from our own” (Wells 20). Here the archetype of the witch dominates feminine roles, “the witch is a metaphor particularly bound to the female gender, perhaps even an archetype for a generic kind of defiant woman” (Wells 1). Although the term *witch* typically means a female with magical skills usually invoked through incantations, spells, and general witchcraft, within the genre of magical feminism *witch* applies more broadly to female characters within a fantasy narrative who are “seeking change and power ... control over one’s own destiny” or more simply: a female with agency (Wells 3).

These texts, specifically designed to appeal to girls, strive to portray heroines with a true sense of agency – strong female role models with whom girls can connect and imitate. With some accuracy, the popular news media has celebrated these narratives as feminist texts. Ginia Bellafante wrote about *Buffy* and similar shows in *Time Magazine* (1997) that these series “center on young women in their mid-teens so capable, self-assured and unfrivolous that any feminist would be proud to call them little sisters” (Bellafante). Joss Whedon, *Buffy*’s celebrated creator/director/writer stated “I would love to see a movie in which a blond wanders into a dark alley, takes care of

herself and deploys her powers” which is exactly what he created in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (qtd. in Bellafante).

These heroines explicitly differ from older heroines such as Nancy Drew because they maintain an “every-girl” persona: they have relatable flaws, they could be the girl down the street or they could be you. Nancy Drew cultivated a perfected state, the ultimate girl: “she winds up in ski country, and suddenly she's winning a ski championship,” while in comparison these new heroines “are not meant to seem superheroic” (Bellafante).

Just as their heroism is buried within an every-girl persona, the magical feminism genre often refrains from overt feminism:

If these programs have managed to grab the attention of 13-year-olds and thirtysomethings alike, it is because they have avoided coming off as dramatized infomercials for the National Organization for Women. Most of these characters are in fact the product of a Camille Paglia feminism that embraces the very pragmatic idea that women can be smart and successful and still care about shoes, Vogue and, of course, the charms of the opposite sex. [Bellafante]

While this decision endangers the feminist messages – texts that refrain from labeling themselves as feminist can easily abandon feminist themes – it also broadens the audience range. This is most visible in *Buffy* which achieved a mixed-gendered audience. Joss Whedon commented on this tactic by saying, “if I can make teenage boys comfortable with a girl who takes charge of a situation without their knowing that's what's happening, it's better than sitting down and selling them on feminism” (qtd. in Bellafante).

Unfortunately, given our social and cultural context, and the capitalistic nature of these texts, even the genre of magical feminism often presents flawed models of

feminism, equality, and female agency. On many levels “‘postfeminist’ audiences are beguiled into the recycling of conventional modes of pleasure oriented to the regulation and normalization of dominant codes of desire, beauty, and embodiment” (Durham 30). However, these texts’ attempts at feminist entertainment and their positioning of strong heroines should be celebrated as (troubled) progress. The genre of magical feminism offers space for increasing equality and female empowerment while constrained in a patriarchal society,

We see that while television fantasy can be used to challenge the boundaries of lived experience through speculative metaphors (such as the female djinn, witch, space adventurer, and superhero), to display female potentialities, and/or to address patriarchal structures that oppress women, such strategies may simultaneously labor to contain the radicalness of the challenge, encouraging the praise of many viewers and critics while leaving the actual status of women unchanged. [Helford 4]

Buffy, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* offer strikingly different heroines and the narratives engage in different versions of magic, power, and feminism. But as part of the magical feminism genre, they differ from other girlhood texts by occasionally offering exciting alternatives to the mainstream approaches to 1) sexuality/dating 2) patriarchal hierarchies, 3) inscribed femininity, 4) Girl Power/Mean Girls, and 5) consumerism. In order to understand how shōjo functions within the American girlhood entertainment genres, I will provide brief explications of *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* – their successes and limitations – since these texts offer the best comparison to shōjo.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Buffy the Vampire Slayer began as a mid-season replacement on The WB in March 1997 and ran for seven seasons, ending in 2003. *Buffy* developed a surprisingly

large and loyal fan base, improving The WB's network ratings and solidifying both the creator, Joss Whedon's status as a lead TV producer and his production company Mutant Enemy, which produced *Buffy*. Moreover, Sarah Michelle Geller won the Teen Choice Award for Choice Actress in 1999, 2000, 2002, and 2003 (IMDB: Awards for Buffy). After a brief summary of the storyline, I will analyze the empowering rhetorical devices that strive for representations of equality and then the limitations and constraints that trouble this narrative.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is the story of a girl, Buffy, who is the Chosen One, the Slayer – the most recent in a long line of females endowed with the supernatural abilities to recognize and slay vampires, demons, and other evil creatures. She is sixteen when the narrative opens and has been slaying for some time already. Her parents are divorced; she lives with her mother and they have recently moved to Sunnydale, CA. Although Buffy had hoped to leave slaying behind, Sunnydale sits on a “Hellmouth,” an opening or portal for creatures of darkness and Buffy quickly finds herself battling evil and saving the world. She is helped along the way by her Watcher, Rupert Giles the school librarian who upholds the Watcher tradition of caring for the Slayer, and her close friends, Willow and Xander. Buffy develops a series of doomed romances, most prominently with the vampires Angel and Spike.

Buffy: Taking Back the Night

Buffy's feminist impulses stem from Buffy's characterization: a heroine with the power and intelligence to save the world. This was Whedon's specific design as he created a narrative in which the typical “blond girl who would always get herself killed”

in stereotypical horror/sci-fi movies stars as the heroine. Whedon explained, “it’s time she got a chance to, you know, take back the night ... I’d love to see a movie where [she] kills the monster” (qtd. in Hibbs 53). Buffy does just that, she kills monsters and owns the night: evil fears her and she prowls through the evening hours making suburbia safe again.

Buffy is feministly characterized through a variety of different aspects. First, Buffy is physically powerful as she punches and kicks her way through each episode, this juxtaposes her to popular culture’s dominant female role of Damsel in Distress and accentuates her physicality in comparison to Xander (her would-be suitor) who constantly needs rescuing. Next, Buffy is intellectually powerful: Buffy is a smart heroine – someone who can figure things out, act with common sense, and devise clever solutions. Although Buffy struggles at school to maintain good grades due to the time constraints slayage puts on homework, she excels as an innovative Slayer. Finally, Buffy is emotionally powerful: she is a confident, self-assured character who accepts her socially-awkward position as Slayer and confidently challenges the supernatural forces of darkness. Her confidence is often displayed through the witty quips and jibes she lobes at the villains and through her calm self-assurance in the face of powerful and gruesome enemies. By enacting this emotional power, Buffy stands as a fearless role-model: she recognizes and is comfortable with her own power. However, there is one important caveat to Buffy’s emotional stability: she spends the vast majority of the series very unhappy. Although confident and self-assured of her Slayer powers, she recognizes that

her unique position as Slayer alters her social, career, and relational goals, and her responsibilities as Slayer often make her dissatisfied and unhappy.

By positioning Buffy as an emotionally, intellectually, and physically powerful heroine, Buffy is empowered with agency. Just as her wooden spikes slay the vampires, her choices decide the course of action in each episode and her actions move the plot and relationships forward. Buffy stands as a fully legitimate agent, “there can be little doubt that Buffy's agency drives the narrative and saves the world. Moreover, she talks back, she looks back, and she can take a blow as well as she can land one” (Owen).

Buffy is undoubtedly a Girl Power⁶ role model as *Buffy* writer and co-producer Fran Rubel Kuzui stated, “from the very beginning, Buffy was always about ‘girl power’ ... Buffy was always about creating a role model for girls” (qtd. in Golden 48). Buffy literally takes back the night as she hunts vampires and demons while maintaining strong and caring relationships with her friends.

Hegemony: Subtle and Scary

While Buffy's character models feminist success, the overriding plot line constrains *Buffy* into a fairly hegemonic, uninspiring narrative, “female heroines, conceived of and written mostly by men in a still male-dominated world, present male fantasies and project the *status quo* more than they fulfill feminist hopes” (Magoulick 729). *Buffy* falls into three prominent patriarchal clichés: controlling men, sexualized female bodies, and an overly hostile world, which establish hegemonic tendencies and counteract some of Buffy's success as a female role-model. I will spend some time

⁶ In keeping with general girlhood entertainment, *Buffy* maintains the Girl Power/Mean Girls dichotomy and as a Girl Power agent, Buffy has a clique of Mean Girls led by the vain Cordelia to face at school.

establishing these themes and fleshing out these issues since they have implications for other fantasy texts such as *Kim Possible* and *Twilight*.

Controlling Men. Buffy has troubling relationships with men throughout this series as they attempt, occasionally successfully, to constrain and control her. This is a common difficulty for heroines as the narratives are shaped to create male/female relationships in which “Men give [the heroines] their strength, help them to channel whatever power they have, and are always lurking, either as potential lovers, as controlling father figures or bosses, as potential threats, or sometimes all three at once” (Magoulick 735). *Buffy* maintains the *status quo* of so many girlhood texts by (like *Charlie’s Angels*) positioning a complicit heroine within dominating patriarchal hierarchies.

Giles is in a formal position of authority over the Slayer as her Watcher. Although women can be Watchers (Giles’ grandmother was a Watcher), the show – which professes to have feminist goals – chose to position a man as Buffy’s Watcher. He is responsible for training and preparing the Slayer, enabling her to defeat evil. While Buffy constantly resists his authority – professing and usually proving that she needs neither training or advice – the narrative is designed to maintain a hierarchy in which men (at the very least) guide and counsel women.

Buffy’s relationship with Xander is also deeply troubled. Originally attracted to Buffy, Xander quickly realizes she is the Slayer and develops a strong friendship with her, tinged with his unrequited love. However, Xander is infinitely insecure with his masculinity. The narrative positions Xander as a high-school “loser:” he has very few

friends, is not smart enough to be in the science cliques, athletic enough to be in the sports cliques, or handsome enough to be part of the popular cliques; he is exceptionally un-date-able and essentially an outsider.

Already struggling with his masculinity in comparison to other boys, Xander enters a crisis when faced with Buffy's agency. Xander voices "the anxieties invoked by the presence of the capable, confident super-heroine" (Owen) in every episode of the first season. He constantly fantasizes about being stronger/faster than Buffy, rescuing her from danger, and appearing manly enough to capture her heart. He is quintessentially not progressive enough to celebrate Buffy's agency.

Finally, Buffy's romantic relationships are even more troubling. The show itself makes an ironically self-aware statement when Spike (Buffy's to-be boyfriend) states, "Got to hand it to you goldilocks [Buffy] – you do have bleeding tragic taste in men" (Goodbye Iowa 4.14). Buffy's dominant romances – her relationships with Angel and Spike which move the plot along – are with inherently violent men who often attack her. This romantic violence is absent from *superhero* stories – Lois Lane never attacks Superman – indicating that romantic violence is a specific curse for heroines. This violence inherent in Buffy's romances is particularly disturbing when, "In the episode where she shares with Angel her first sexual experience (on her [seventeenth] birthday), Buffy and Angel engage subsequently in a series of mean-spirited battles in which he attacks her verbally, emotionally, and finally physically" (Magoulick 737).

Here *Buffy* interacts with the common girlhood theme of female sexuality which is usually framed in the dangerous context of disease and/or pregnancy. However,

Buffy's approach ratchets up the danger level: instead of leading to health clinics, female sexuality awakens a monster, endangers the woman, and jeopardizes the world in general. By denying Buffy any semblance of peaceful, comforting romance the narrative suggests that female agency is incompatible with romance, "listening to such dialogue and watching scenes so intensely violent between 'lovers,' one cannot help but get the message that being in love is more torment than pleasure for the female superhero" (Magoulick 738).

Buffy's Body. Heroines' bodies are a particularly vulnerable site for inequality and oppression, "women's intellectual, technical, and/or physical skills may pale in comparison to the way they wear their costumes. Xena's leather corset and Buffy's revealing clothes and incessant hairstyle changes (toward ever greater blonderness) exemplify this well" (Helford 6). Buffy is simultaneously positioned as bodily powerful – she has superhuman strength and agility – yet her body is conventionally slender and curvaceous, "the shows' narratives of the body contain a contradictory mixture of forms that simultaneously challenge and reassert dominant constructions of gender, race, and class" (Durham 26). It is tenuously possible that women could punch and kick with Buffy's strength, but to achieve that strength and agility their bodies would look nothing like Buffy's. In popular culture, heroines' "physical potency must be rendered safely and recognizably as feminine ... a two-hundred-pound girl hero would be perceived as monstrous-or unintelligible, in Foucault's (1979) formulation. To be intelligible to contemporary viewers, the girl's body must be slender, small-boned, and curvaceous" (Durham 26). Buffy's thinness "works to neutralize the threat of a physically strong

teenage girl” (Durham 26). Here we see the impulse toward the common girlhood theme of inscribed femininity: the emphasis on Buffy’s body codes her as feminine when her behavior is too masculine. Beyond maintaining hegemonic ideologies, Buffy’s body is further commercialized through Sarah Michelle Geller’s complicity as she “hawks Maybelline mascara in the advertisements flashed during the show” (Durham 28).

This is a delicate issue to address since the “impulse to damn Buffy as non-feminist for her appearance is as bad as saying she can’t be strong because she is female ... by continuing to define anything feminine as non-feminist, we allow a male dominated, male-valued system to continue defining femininity as bad” (Wells 175-6). Therefore, while hesitant to criticize Buffy’s incessant hairstyling, revealing outfits, and unlikely heels, I can agree that “women who would fulfill more clearly feminist ideals of the heroic would need not routinely bare their midriffs” (Magoulick 753).

Overly Hostile World. Hostility is a necessary component of most fantasy narratives – the plot necessitates that something/someone be evil, dangerous, or otherwise hostile towards the protagonist and/or humanity in general: Superman faces Lex Luther, Batman and Spiderman have their villains, and Luke Skywalker faces Darth Vader and Emperor Palpatine. However, heroines such as Buffy face hostility not only from their enemies, but also from the domestic sphere – a space that offers safety to superheroes, “within [heroines’] hostile environments they fight physically and emotionally not only with obviously evil enemies, but also with romantic love partners, family, and friends. Thus their domestic spaces also threaten them rather than offering respite” (Magoulick 729). Buffy suffers “violence, torment, and hatred even from loved

ones” as Xander tries to rape her (The Pack 1.6), her mother (convinced Buffy is a witch) tries to burn her at the stake (Gingerbread 3.11) and her boyfriends, Angel and Spike both repeatedly try to kill her in addition to vampires and demons crawling through her school and suburb (Magoulick 741).

This overly hostile world suggests that heroines *should not exist* as nearly every force within their world attempts to annihilate or contain them. The narrative structure itself is designed to brutalize the heroine, to punish her for escaping the patriarchal order. While Buffy’s characterization is a successful model of a feminist heroine, the narrative overpowers her with hegemonic forces, constraining her possibilities as a role-model for girls. While *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* makes certain progress towards greater equality and the possibility of empowered, agentic heroines, the narrative is deeply troubled by constraining ideologies with function to constrain the heroine. Feminists must continue to hope for better narratives, ones in which the heroine “would not be necessarily, formatively, and violently linked to men, and would not suffer tormented lives in a brutal world” (Magoulick 753).

Kim Possible

Kim Possible is a hit show on Disney’s cable channel programming. Its ratings were high enough that the Disney Channel bent its standard “three season” rule for animated programming and aired a special fourth season along with several TV-movie specials. *Kim Possible*, a cartoon targeting a tween girl audience, aired from 2001-2007, and is now in syndication. Although *Kim Possible* targets a similar audience during overlapping years with *Buffy*, *Kim* has a significantly lighter tone: where *Buffy* bordered

on the horror/sci-fi genre, *Kim* is solidly comedy – the villains are funnier than they are scary, and neither Kim nor her side-kick, Ron, face any serious or disturbing danger.

Kim Possible is the story of a girl, Kim Possible, who, with assistance from her side-kick, best friend, and eventual boyfriend, Ron Stoppable, battles evil-geniuses and saves the world in each twenty-minute episode. Kim lives with her family in suburbia where her father works as a rocket-scientist and her mother as a brain-surgeon. Kim is captain of her high school cheer-team and excels at school. Ron is her childhood friend, lives nearby, and is ultimately un-cool: he is bad at crime-fighting, bad at school, has few friends, is obsessed with the local taco store, and although he frequents the super-villains' lairs as Kim's side-kick, they can never remember his name. The villains are a repetitive cast of four or five (depending on the season) evil-geniuses who constantly break out of prison, build variations of death-rays, attempt world domination, and, thwarted by Kim, end up back in prison.

Feminism Is Possible

Like *Buffy*, much of *Kim Possible*'s feminist tendencies stem from Kim's character. She is physically powerful: she single-handedly (since Ron is very little help) defeats super-villain after super-villain, usually without breaking a sweat. She is intellectually powerful: she is the good-genius, the master planner and innovative thinker who discovers the villains' weaknesses and foils their plans. She is emotionally powerful: comfortable with her own power and certain of her skills, Kim exudes self-esteem and confidence. Kim Possible acts with a high level of agency throughout the series: although she always acts in response to a super-villain's plans for world

domination, she chooses how, when, and where to foil them, while maintaining an active life with her family, friends, and cheerleading team.

Unlike *Buffy*, most of the narrative structure is designed to empower Kim and support her as a heroine. *Kim Possible* creates a world in which Kim escapes the male domination and overly hostile world that plagued Buffy. Where Buffy had Giles as her Watcher and guardian always preparing her for the next battle, Kim finds her own battles and needs no leadership – when she does need the research-type help Giles provides Buffy with, Kim turns to her peer and friend, Wade, for information. Where Buffy’s side-kick Xander incessantly struggled with an inferiority complex stemming from his “loser” status and masculinity issues in comparison to Buffy, Kim’s side-kick, Ron, embraces his role as Kim’s supporting character and relishes his own identity despite his social marginality. Where Xander’s attraction to Buffy was always tinged with his need to prove himself her physical equal, Ron’s attraction to Kim is saturated in friendship, support, and a celebration of Kim’s heroism. And where Buffy experienced debilitating and violent romances with Angel and Spike, Kim’s developing romance with Ron is mutually supporting, fun, and caring. *Kim Possible* engages with the common girlhood theme of female sexuality by offering a positive example of romance.

Finally, where Buffy’s domestic world teemed with hostility from her mother, friends, and boyfriends, subtly suggesting that heroines are not worthy of the love and acceptance heroes experience, Kim experiences a more welcoming world in which the villains are hostile and her domestic sphere is loving. Nurtured by equally brilliant parents and respected by her teachers, with friends at school and a social status as a

cheerleader (Buffy did not make the cheerleading team she wanted to be part of), Kim can relax at home and school in a peaceful and loving environment. This narrative structure of separating the hostile and domestic spheres allows Kim to be a happy superheroine – a rare case in popular culture.

Both Kim and Ron have moments of insecurity, in which Kim wonders if boys will like her even though she's stronger than they are (*So the Drama* 2005) and Ron wonders if Kim could like him even though she's theoretically out-of-his-league (Ill Suited 4.1). However this is the exception for Kim and Ron, unlike *Buffy* where these insecurities are the *status quo* for Buffy and Xander.

Moreover, *Buffy* treats these insecurities in a serious and depressing manner, continually denying the characters any semblance of a peaceful, contented romance. Consider this episode conclusion in which Buffy and her friends consider their love lives:

Setting: Buffy, Willow, and Xander sitting on a bench

Willow: The one boy who's really liked me and he's a demon robot. What does that say about me?

Buffy: That doesn't say anything about you. [...] Hey! Did you forget? The one boy I got the hots for since I moved here turned out to be a vampire.

Xander: Right and the teacher I had a crush on: Giant Preying Mantis.

Willow: (encouraged) That's true.

Xander: Yeah, that's life on the Hellmouth.

Buffy: "Let's face it: none of us are ever going to have a happy, normal relationship."

Xander: "We're doomed!"

(Laughter – then the reality sinks in and the scene fades with their faces glum and serious). [I Robot, You Jane 1.8].

Although this scene is comedic for the audience, the characters are left in a dismal reality of frustrated relationships and a lack of intimacy. Because Buffy is the

Slayer, she – and by extension her friends – cannot experience “happy, normal relationships,” positioning them in a tragic reality. In contrast, *Kim* treats these insecurities and tensions humorously and quickly resolves them to affirm that Kim can be romantically attractive while being a heroine and Ron’s low social status is insignificant compared to his quality personality. They share a happy, normal relationship.

Possible’s Problems

While *Kim Possible’s* narrative structure goes a long way to support Kim as an exemplarily feminist heroine, the narrative has two significant shortcomings: a male-dominated world and a combination of hyper-femininity and consumerism. This dual nature, in which *Kim Possible* exceeds many expectations offering empowerment and equality and then falls back into familiar patterns of constraint is fairly common for girl power texts,

Girl power discourse is simultaneously progressive and regressive. Girl power discourse suggests that girls are strong and can do anything, but it also places limits on that strength and potential—implying they depend on a girl’s successful negotiation of a normatively feminine behavior and appearance, which relies on the consumption of various commodities. [Hains iii-iv]

Kim Possible exists in a male dominated world – her school teacher is male, the villains are male, the other crime-fighters are male, and most of Kim’s friends are male. The only “girl zone” is Kim’s cheerleading team, and they exist primarily as a foil represented by Kim’s rival Bonnie who constantly tries to undermine Kim and/or force her into greater feminine conformity: to give up crime-fighting, date a jock, and abandon

her friendship/romance with Ron. In fact, Bonnie along with the Shego – the principal villain’s female side-kick – form the Mean Girl opposites to Kim’s Girl Power.

Shego’s relationship with her boss, Dr. Draken, reveals the normative patriarchy this show is still complicit in. Dr. Draken is the principle super-villain with a Frankensteinian appearance, although his plans for world domination are usually intrinsically flawed even before Kim arrives to thwart him. Dr. Draken hired Shego – an attractive green-tinged woman who is Kim’s only physical equal – as his side-kick. Shego is stronger, smarter, and more confident than Dr. Draken. She constantly modifies Dr. Draken’s plans so they actually function and rescues him from Kim. Even more tellingly, Dr. Draken is plagued with insecurities: he constantly questions if he is “evil” enough and just as Buffy calms Xander’s masculinity fears, Shego spends entire episodes assuring Dr. Draken that he is a true evil-genius. The inequality of their relationship – clearly Shego is the more powerful of the two yet remains contained by Dr. Draken – coupled with the predominant male-dominance throughout the show reestablishes patriarchy as an untroubled norm and Kim’s heroism is a rare exception that not even her female friends can imitate. Here we see *Kim Possible*’s troubled attempt to navigate the common girlhood theme of patriarchal hierarchies.

The second hegemonic impulse in *Kim Possible* is the combination of beauty standards and consumerism. Like Buffy, Kim is strong but does not *look* strong, “teen hero Kim Possible is rendered as a very pretty girl. She has large round eyes, flowing red hair, a tiny waist, shapely thighs, and a perpetually exposed navel” (Hains 184). Kim embraces the “girls rule” empowerment rhetoric with nearly unparalleled success in

American popular culture, and yet she still reinforces unattainable, dominant beauty ideals. As with Buffy, Kim's physicality teeters between the celebration of femininity and the reestablishment of the male gaze as Kim's femininity is inscribed through her physicality.

Another consideration is that even as Kim's body "suggests that females can embrace femininity without being disrespected for it" it also codes beauty with power, suggesting that girl power is not the "domain of all girls, but only those who meet normative feminine standards" (Hains 198). Moreover, Kim's femininity is coded not only through her body but also through her hobbies: when not saving the world, Kim likes to shop. In fact, shopping is one of the few activities Kim enjoys with her only female friend, Monique. While this emphasis on commercialization and commoditization ties into the network's prerogative as a capitalistic venture, it also suggests that this unattainable femininity can be purchased at the mall.

Despite these issues with a normatively patriarchal world and the combination of unattainable beauty standards coupled with commercialization, *Kim Possible* makes significant strides towards female empowerment in both the characterization of Kim and the narrative structure and plot lines throughout the series. This animated TV program targeting a girl audience contradicts the hegemonic "idea that power is a masculine strength, [and suggests] that femininity and strength are not dichotomous" (Hains 180).

Twilight

The Twilight Series by Stephanie Meyer consists of four books (2004-2008) that have sold over 17 million copies world-wide and is now being released as movies

(Barnes). The first film (*Twilight* 2008) sold over \$70.6 million in tickets during the opening weekend alone (Barnes). The series (both books and film) have garnered significant media attention as a pop-culture phenomenon targeting a girl audience. Due to its fantasy genre, *Twilight* is often likened to *Harry Potter*, “But while the ‘Harry Potter’ series was read by a broad audience that included children, teenagers and adults of both genders, the ‘Twilight’ books target a much narrower demographic: teenage girls and young women” (Sax).

The *Twilight Series* is the story of a high school junior, Bella Swan, who falls in love with an immortal vampire, Edward Cullen. Bella’s parents are divorced and the story opens as Bella moves in with her father in the small town of Forks, WA. Shortly after setting eyes on Edward Cullen in the school cafeteria, Bella is obsessed with him and soon thereafter deeply in love with him. Edward lives with his adopted vampire family – and they cultivate a “vegetarian” existence by only feeding on animals. The vampires are impossibly beautiful, strong, and fast, with heightened senses and a penchant towards the finer things in life. Edward is unusual, even for a vampire, since he can read minds – except for Bella’s. They quickly develop a passionate and tumultuous romance marked by Edward’s hunger for her blood, parental concerns, a jealous best friend, dangerous enemies, competitive werewolf packs, and Bella’s ultimate desire to become a vampire and spend eternity with Edward.

The Twilight of Feminism

The *Twilight Series* positions itself as a progressive text with feminist tendencies. Bella establishes herself as a feminist, writing a term paper on misogyny in

Shakespeare's plays (Meyer *Twilight* 143), and recognizes the inequality in her relationship with Edward. Since Edward is a vampire, he is stronger, faster, incredibly more beautiful, and continually saves her life. Bella wants to become a vampire since this would not only allow her to live with Edward forever, but equalize their relationship as she says to Edward, "it just seems logical ... a man and a woman have to be somewhat equal ... as in, one of them can't always be swooping in and saving the other one. They have to save each other *equally* ... I can't always be Lois Lane ... I want to be Superman too" (emphasis in original Meyer *Twilight* 474).

Notably, Edward and Bella love each other equally and neither can survive without the other. And finally, once Bella becomes a vampire, in *Breaking Dawn*, she is, temporarily, more powerful than Edward and has a talent of mental shielding⁷ which is instrumental in the final confrontation between Bella, the Cullens, and other friendly vampires against the evil and powerful aristocracy of vampires, the Volturi.

These elements suggest a feminist impulse throughout the series. Bella is situated as a feminist early on in the narrative. This is true in the film version as well, evidenced when Bella asks Edward out and recommends her friend Angela ask another boy to the prom, saying "just take control, you're a strong, confident woman" (*Twilight*). Edward and Bella are situated as equally in love and emotionally dependant on each other. And, objectively speaking, Bella and Edward are physical and mental equals at the conclusion of the narrative.

⁷ The inverse of Edward's mind-reading talent, Bella's talent shields herself and/or others from mental tampering – which was why, even as a human, Bella was resistant to Edward's talent.

Sucking the Blood out of Feminism

Unfortunately, neither Bella's character or the narrative structure function to maintain the feminist impulses that occasionally mark the *Twilight Series*. Throughout the series, Bella's self-doubt, Edward's dangerous superiority, and patriarchal hierarchies work in conjunction to deprive Bella of agency.

Bella's Self-Doubt. Bella is one of the least empowered heroines in popular culture as she constantly doubts herself: she considers it practically impossible that Edward could love *her*, has constant body image crises – especially when faced with Edward's beautiful vampire sister, Rosalie, and continually compares herself to Edward – always coming up short in the comparison, “he was too perfect, I realized with a piercing stab of despair. There was no way this godlike creature could be meant for me” (Meyer *Twilight* 256). Although Bella is beautiful and (much to the Mean Girls' disgust) captures most of the boys' attention at school, she never recognizes her attractiveness. In keeping with the common girlhood theme of the Girl Power/Mean Girl dichotomy, even Bella who is so tenuously positioned as a Girl Power representative receives a Mean Girl backlash from her classmates.

Edward's Superiority. Throughout the series, Edward is undoubtedly superior to Bella in every quantifiable way. Unlike Buffy and Kim Possible, who are physically more powerful than the men in their lives, Bella is completely under Edward's control. Continually clumsy, Bella is in constant need of Edward's rescuing – a state only magnified when they come in contact with villains. If Edward's physicality were not enough disparity between the protagonists, his mental talent of mind reading empowers

him throughout the series. Able to read others' minds gives Edward agency, he can choose how to respond to situations he otherwise would not know existed. Edward is also emotionally superior: he is confident of his own powers, confident of Bella's love for him, and confident of his role in her life. Finally, Edward is intellectually superior: since he is approximately a hundred years old (although still seventeen), Edward has matriculated several times, is supremely musical, and excels at everything as Bella truthfully states, "Edward can do everything" (Meyers *Twilight* 325).

Aside from his narrative empowerment as physically, emotionally, and intellectually superior to Bella, Edward's behavior is decidedly anti-feminist: he forces Bella in and out of cars; he kidnaps her; he stalks her; he watches her while she sleeps (unbeknownst to her), lurking in her bedroom and outside her window; he forbids her from visiting her best friend; he is overly jealous, overly protective, and possessive. However, Edward Cullen is heralded as the perfect boyfriend and the role has catapulted the actor, Robert Pattinson to automatic sex-god standing, "the young British heartthrob [is] Edward Cullen, *Twilight's* dreamy, sculpted hunk of a teenage vampire ... Pattinson has a look so broodingly unearthly it's no wonder he doesn't sprout fangs" (Gleiberman). Edward Cullen is featured on bumper-stickers and T-shirts in addition to the popular posters. The character, and actor Robert Pattinson, have inspired multi-thousand member Facebook groups such as, "Because of Edward Cullen, human boys have lost their charm;" "Forget 'Prince Charming' - I'm waiting for my 'Edward Cullen;'" "Edward Cullen owns my soul;" (Edward Cullen) and "When God Made Robert Pattinson He Was Just Showing Off" (Robert Pattinson). This newly designated

dream-boyfriend is actually more of a real-life nightmare than anything else and this relationship, idolized by American girls, is prescriptively detrimental.

Moreover, *Twilight's* approach to female sexuality is particularly troubled. On the positive side, Bella avoids sexual passivity: she acknowledges her own sexuality and is interested in exploring this area of her life. However, Edward while overtly attracted to her, contains her sexuality. Here again, we see the common girlhood theme in which female sexuality is inextricably linked to danger: Edward is so strong he might accidentally kill her when he means to caress her (Meyer *Twilight* 310). This means that they explore sexuality on his terms: she is supposed to remain absolutely still while he kisses her (Meyer *Twilight* 366). Even after their marriage, sexuality remains intensely dangerous for Bella: their first sexual encounter leaves her pregnant and bruised from head to toe (Meyer *Breaking Dawn* 88-89). Although the narrative does close with a positive image of sexuality since vampire Bella is finally safe from Edward and they enjoy passionate sexuality throughout their marriage.

Patriarchal Hierarchies. Although Bella is the narrator and lead character, *Twilight* undermines its own potential by recreating patriarchal hierarchies. First, *Twilight* cultivates a patriarchal domestic sphere: Bella leaves her mother's home where she had nearly complete control of the household finances, schedule, and routine and certainly had complete independence due to her mother's "erratic, harebrained" personality (Meyer *Twilight* 4) and moves in with her father, where she must obey his curfews, mandates, and cultivates a domestic position as the housekeeper. *Twilight* then cultivates a patriarchal romantic sphere: Bella dates the god-like, all-powerful vampire

Edward – a relationship marked by her obedience to him and his superiority in every way; moreover, Bella’s romantic alternative and best friend, Jacob Black, is an almost-all-powerful werewolf, who, although admittedly less controlling than Edward, still occasionally forces himself on Bella with unwanted kisses. Finally, *Twilight* cultivates traditional patriarchal structures in the social sphere by situating males in every position of authority.

Bella’s Non-Agency. This all functions to dis-empower Bella, stripping her of agency and equality. Bella is physically unable to assert her will throughout the series – she is always a frail in comparison to Edward, Jacob, and the villains. This frailty continues even after she becomes a vampire – although temporarily stronger than Edward, he is still positioned as the fighter and Bella’s talent of mental shielding makes her a *defensive* figure on the battlefield. Moreover, her position on the battlefield is decidedly feminine since the battle is over her daughter – casting what could have been Bella’s moment of physical competence instead as a mothering instinct. Bella is continually constrained by the men in her life and lacks the agency to either leave Edward or convince him to abandon his controlling and oppressing behavior as any self-respecting feminist would do.

Fantasy Texts as Feminist(?)

By distancing themselves from the “real world,” fantasy girlhood texts are able to more openly challenge hegemonic structures and frame themselves as feminist texts. *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* each position themselves as feminist texts which encourage equality, yet they achieve this goal with varying success. The texts

manipulate their messages through two prime venues: 1) the heroine's characterization, and 2) the narrative structure. Generally speaking *Buffy* maintains the *status quo* because while the heroine is progressively empowered, the narrative structure is overpoweringly constraining. In contrast *Kim Possible* is more effectively feminist as it positions an empowered heroine in a patriarchally troubled but generally empowering narrative structure. Meanwhile the *Twilight Series* fails on both accounts by positioning a severely limited heroine in an obsessively constraining narrative structure (see Table 2).

These texts each interact with the five common themes running through girlhood entertainment, 1) sexuality/dating, 2) patriarchal hierarchies, 3) inscribed femininity, 4) Girl Power/Mean Girls, and 5) consumerism. *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and the *Twilight Series* offer a range of approaches to these topics, some more progressive than others. *Buffy* and the *Twilight Series* each position heroines who explore their sexuality while continuing to frame female sexuality as inherently dangerous while *Kim Possible* (due to its "family friendly policy" on the Disney Channel) offers a more vague but also more equitable and encouraging look at female sexuality and romance. *Twilight* has the most oppressive iteration of patriarchal hierarchies, while *Buffy* simultaneously reestablishes patriarchy through the plot developments and challenges it through Buffy's characterization, and *Kim Possible* offers the least dominant form in male super-villains Kim repeatedly defeats. *Buffy* and *Kim Possible* each need to inscribe femininity on the heroines' bodies through overt physical displays of midriffs, hairstyles, thighs and cleavage due to heroine's masculine activities. Bella avoids this inscribed femininity in

Table 2: Fantasy Texts and Feminism

	Empowered Heroine?	Empowering Narrative?
<i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i>	√	×
<i>Kim Possible</i>	√	√
<i>Twilight Series</i>	×	×

Twilight but she also never participates in masculine activities – her femininity is unquestioned. All three texts maintain the false Girl Power/Mean Girls dichotomy, maneuvering the “empowered” heroine into the “good girl” role who has access to Girl Power while casting vain, self-obsessed, traditionally feminine characters as their Mean Girl opposites. And all three texts participate in the theme of consumerism as *Buffy*, *Kim*, and *Bella* to varying extents model a consumerist lifestyle.

Research Questions

As shōjo enters the American girlhood context it mixes with the mainstream themes of sexuality/dating, patriarchal order, inscribed femininity, Girl Power/Mean Girls, and consumerism. Shōjo functions as an alternative to this mainstream entertainment. Like fantasy girlhood texts such as *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight*, which attempt (flawed) models of female empowerment, shōjo situates powerful heroines in the midst of exotic situations. However, shōjo is considerably more successful at female empowerment than its American counterparts. Considering the unusual heroines and the prevalence of cross-dressing in shōjo, a close critical analysis of shōjo must examine their relationship with the prevalent themes in American girlhood texts. Moreover, we must examine how the audience relates to shōjo: how the portrayal of shōjo heroines influences audience members and their level of identification with the heroines. In order to examine if shōjo heroines are empowered, how gender is constructed in shōjo manga texts, and how shōjo manga is received by the audience, this analysis will focus around the following research questions:

1. How is agency distributed between the heroine and the hero? How is the narrative constructed to provide heroines with agency?
2. How do the protagonists perform gender? Are traditional gender norms affirmed or subverted by the heroines and/or cross-dressing protagonists?
3. How do audience members perceive shōjo heroines? Do these heroines stimulate parasocial relationships and/or wishful identification? Given how audience members relate to these heroines, how are the themes developed through these heroines received? How do audience members understand shōjo in relation to American girlhood entertainment?

Finding the answers to the first two questions requires a close critical analysis informed by feminist and gendered theories of shōjo manga and its subgenre, Gender Benders. To answer the third question, I have conducted both an audience survey and a message-board analysis informed by the theories of Parasocial Relationships and Wishful Identification to understand how audience members perceive and relate to shōjo.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand the role that shōjo manga plays in the American context, the messages and themes it purports, and its popularity with American girls, I will analyze its content, rhetorical devices, and audience reception. In order to successfully achieve these goals, I will engage in (1) a close critical reading of shōjo manga texts, informed by feminist and gendered theories, and (2) assess these readers' reception of shōjo manga by conducting a survey and analyzing audience-generated boards. Before performing this close critical analysis, I must spend some time establishing the theories I will be drawing upon in my later analysis.

Feminism: Power and Agency

The question of power has been central to third wave feminists as they analyze situations through the Foucault-ian lens of power and agency. In the quest for equality – the equal disbursement of power and agency between not only the two sexes, but also between races, classes, and nationalities – feminists have learned to analyze media in terms of power relationships and to assess who has agency and how they derived it. This concept of agency, borrowed from Burke's pentad and defined as the means through which an act is performed, or rather, the power and autonomy with which to choose and to act (Foss 384), allows feminist communication scholars to map out power flows within a narrative or other media production. As Foucault reminds scholars "power is everywhere" because it is produced "in every relation," hence feminist scholarship must

focus on the relationships between individuals – constantly asking who has power? Who has agency? (Foucault 93).

In my analysis of shōjo manga, I will analyze the power relations, carefully investigating how these texts distribute power and agency between their male and female characters. I will work to illuminate instances of inequality within these texts and to examine the social damage inflicted by the “natural” assumption of these hierarchies, even as I suggest that shōjo manga strives towards a demonstration of equality within its overriding narrative.

Feminism: Gender Performance

Within popular culture, with its myriad of gendered representations, one finds an assumed series of “binary roles and behaviors which ultimately constitute the very notions of male and female, masculinity and femininity” and these constructed representations dictate the audience’s self-construction, “at least in terms of their gendered and sexual behavior” (Sloop 2). Hence, media operates to *naturalize* the cultural constructions of gender, when in actuality, gender is an external performance, not an internal nature.

In defining gender as performance, Judith Butler stated, “where performative suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (Butler 139), or more simply put “gender is what we *do* rather than what we *are*” (Sloop 6). This conceptualization of gender is notably addressed by Erving Goffman who approaches gender performance through the lens of ritualistic displays. In analyzing gender performance, he recognized repetitive elements that are rituals of gender performance.

Goffman further categorizes these gender displays into *early-warning functions*, *bracket rituals*, and *overlay rituals*.

Early-warning functions are external, gender specific symbols such as hairstyles and clothing that function to warn others from afar that the person approaching is male or female. *Bracket rituals* occur at functional moments, such as the beginning and end of an interaction, and bracket the experience in a gendered manner, such as stylistic greetings (hugging vs. shaking hands). Finally, *overlay rituals* are gendered character traits that exist above the activity, such as attitudes and behaviors: a man and woman can be involved in the same activity (talking, walking, etc) yet practice differentiating overlay rituals through which they perform their gender (vocal indicators, body language, gendered phrases, facial expressions, etc) (Goffman 64, 66). Hence, Goffman reminds us of the “unnatural” reality of femininity and masculinity, the optional nature of all gender displays, and that one performs gender through culturally created, ritualistic displays.

In my analysis of shōjo, and especially of its subgenre, Gender Benders – where protagonists successfully cross-dress, I will be particularly attentive to the gender displays: how characters perform gender and if and how that performance reconstructs gender for the readers.

Narrative Criticism

Since my texts are essentially stories, I will draw on Narrative Criticism as I explore the messages and rhetorical devices employed throughout these series. Walter Fischer’s Narrative Paradigm suggests that humans communicate narratively – that

“people’s symbolic actions take the form of stories” (Fischer 19), and drawing from Kenneth Burke’s dramaturgic work, the Narrative Paradigm incorporates “the concept of identification to account for how people come to adopt stories” (Fischer 19). Hence, individuals interpret their own lives – their own actions and the events that happened to them – as a narrative, and interpret others’ symbolic action as narrative. Finally, individuals evaluate the narratives they encounter: individuals are more likely to accept a story if they identify with it, and if the story is internally coherent – the story is believable as a series of events, and has external fidelity – is an accurate representation of reality. Hence, when audience members read and/or watch these shōjo narratives, they evaluate them primarily according to the following questions,

1. *Identification*: Do I identify with the characters? With their values, hopes and/or outlook on life?
2. *Coherence*: Does the story make sense? Are there plot holes?
3. *Fidelity*: Does the story’s themes, plot structure, and characters correspond with what I know to be true of reality and human nature?

As a critic I will analyze these texts looking for these narrative devices (identification, coherence, and fidelity) in order to understand how these texts appeal to their audience. Furthermore, using an analysis of audience generated message boards and the responses to my open ended survey questions, I will explore how audience members explain their interaction with shōjo narratives according to these three elements.

Comics as Narrative

Shōjo’s narrative form presents some unique aspects to this analysis. Since both shōjo manga (graphic novels) and shōjo anime (animated TV programs) utilize the same comic-book style in which the characters are all artistically represented, action often

takes place within frames, dialogue and/or narration often occurs through bubbles or captions, and it is not unusual for the setting and/or characters to radically change shape for the sake of artistic expression during a scene. This comic-book form requires audience members to perform what Seymour Chatman termed *reading out* – the process through which one interprets surface conventions to understand the deeper narrative,

One reads the relevant narrative features out of or through one sort of nonverbal manifestation, namely the comic strip. This kind of “reading out” is qualitatively different from ordinary reading, though so familiar as to seem totally “natural.” But the conventions are there and are crucial, even if patently self-evident and self-instructional—the arbitrary figures, like the frame, the puffs of smoke to indicate speed, and the bubbles for dialogue or thinking are effortlessly learned by very small children. But that they are conventions is clear enough ... [but] I do not minimize the problems entailed in surface reading, itself a profoundly cultural and by no means “natural” process. [Chatman 41, 42]

As Chatman indicates, *shōjo* adheres to cultural conventions at the surface level that convey narrative meaning to the audience. However, these are Japanese conventions, and, although the text is translated, many of the conventions must be slowly learned by Americans who will originally find the conventions odd and unusual at best and unintelligible at worst. For example,

American comics have a long tradition of using words to represent sounds, but they are usually limited to describing explosions (BAROOM!), fists impacting on jaws (POW!), and machine guns zapping away at Commies (BUDABUDABUDA). The Japanese have won the war of words. They have sounds that represent noodles being slurped (SURU SURU), umpteen types of rain (ZA, BOTSUN BOTSU, PARA PARA), and the sudden flame from a propane cigarette lighter (SHUBO). In recent years, artists have wrought miracles of paradox: the use of sound to depict silent activities and emotions. [Schodt *Manga!* 23]

In addition to the graphic text constantly interjecting “unusual” noises, American audience members must learn other narrative conventions: sudden bubble or flower

backgrounds indicate a romantic mood, falling cherry blossoms indicate a mixture of romance and a feeling of transience and/or loss and sadness, nose-bleeds mean someone is thinking lustful thoughts, characters scratch their heads when confused or embarrassed, and characters often have at least two visual manifestations: their normal appearance – what they really look like, and a *chibi* self – a shorter, rounder, childlike appearance for when they behave childishly, act in a way the audience will find cute, or when they want to be perceived as cute by other characters in the narrative.

This cultural difference adds an element of cultural exoticism to shōjo. Audience members must learn a new visual vocabulary in order to understand shōjo and their expertise is self-rewarding: the more one learns, the more one understands the text's nuances. And this cultural exoticism is a nearly unending source of enjoyment; no matter how experienced an audience member is at interpreting shōjo's stylistic elements there is still more to learn.

No matter how well translated, many are still very 'Japanese' in story, visual style, and pacing. Pictures are intrinsically linked with verbal jokes and even puns. Sometimes characters seem to have nothing but dots in their word balloons, or to be gazing incessantly at horizons or making poignant gestures ... manga are written and drawn by artists thinking in Japanese. [Schodt *Dreamland* 30]

As a critic, my analysis is concerned with how these texts utilize their visual style to convey their messages and with how audience members conceptualize their involvement with shōjo's visual communication.

Archetypes and Narratives

Whether one accepts Campbell and Jung's theory of a universal collective memory or simply recognizes the prevalence of certain character types that have accrued

universal value through their reoccurring presence in myths and popular culture, character and narrative archetypes exist across cultures, genres, and narratives. Regardless of how individuals acquire archetypes (through a universal collective memory or social iteration), archetypes function at an instinctual level knowable only through the “ideas, behaviors, and symbols to which the archetype gives rise. Whereas the *patterns* underlying symbol formation in the psyche are the same everywhere, the images that express them vary from culture to culture” (Rushing, Frentz 33). This means that archetypes such as the King, the Lover, the Trickster, the Wise Old Man, and the Warrior exist across cultures and permeate cultural myths and narratives.

Shōjo narratives utilize stock characters – the heroines, heroes, and supporting characters in different series often seem like carbon copies of each other, the hair color and names change but the personalities and roles often remain constant across various series. As I analyze shōjo narratives, considering gender roles and the heroines’ portrayal, identifying archetypes and how they function within the narrative will help illuminate how these texts function cross-culturally and appeal to an international audience.

Audience Reception of Feminist Texts

As individuals watch and read entertainment texts, they develop relationships with the media characters: individuals love some characters and hate others, they talk to the television screens as if the characters could hear them, they imitate behavior, gestures, and characteristic phrases read in or heard from media texts, they talk with real-life friends about media plots and relationships as if gossiping about actual

acquaintances. As shōjo manga/anime readers and watchers develop relationships with shōjo heroines, two important media theories illuminate these relationships: *wishful identification*, in which individuals identify with characters they wish they were like, and *parasocial relationships*, in which individuals form on-going, one-sided relationships with media characters. Individuals can be simultaneously involved in both wishful identification and a parasocial relationship with a media character (Eyal & Rubin 81).

Wishful Identification

Media consumers often identify with media characters, forming empathetic and cognitive ties to the character. This usually increases the entertainment value as individuals can imagine themselves inside the narrative by identifying with a media character.

Identifying with a character means feeling an affinity toward the character that is so strong that we become absorbed in the text and come to an empathic understanding for the feelings and character experiences, and for his or her motives and goals. We experience what happens to the characters as if it happens to us while, momentarily at least, forgetting ourselves as audience members, and this intensifies our viewing experience. Thus, identification has both affective (empathy) and cognitive (understanding goals and motives, perspective-taking) components. [Cohen 184]

This is a flexible state and audience members typically move in and out of identification, “continually shifting from their role as viewers to their identification with character(s)” (Cohen 185). *Similarity* plays a significant role in determining the type of character audience members identify with: “similarity in age, sex, and social class” are important factors in forming an identification with a media character (Cohen 185, Maccoby and Wilson 76-87). However, beyond these demographic indicators, *role modeling* often invites identification: individuals “identify with those whom they *wish* to be like ...

children (older than eight) engage in *wishful identification* with characters that are somewhat older and reflect what they would like to be, more than what they are” (emphasis added Cohen 187, Feilitzen and Linne 51-55).

In studies on wishful identification within the American context, researchers often found that “girls often choose to identify with male characters” (Cohen 187, Eyal & Rubin 77-98, and Hoffner 389-402). This is best explained when we look at the character traits viewers indicate to explain wishful identification: intelligence and a sense of humor – traditionally masculine traits in American entertainment texts (Hoffner 389-402). And finally, audience members tend to develop wishful identifications with characters who narrate the story and/or speak directly to the audience – these glimpses into the character’s mind and motives, the unveiling of their soul allows audience members to understand the characters more fully and identify with them more completely (Nodelman 1-30, Auter 173-181).

Shōjo heroines are often presented as role models – they are supremely selfless individuals, caring, encouraging, friendly, and yet also humorous, intelligent, bold and creative characters. They have similar demographics to the audience members – high school girls – and yet behave in a combination of traditionally masculine and feminine characteristics so as to embody the best of both genders. Moreover, they not only narrate the stories, but occasionally address the readers/watchers directly. In analyzing how audience members relate to shōjo manga and anime it is important to understand if and how audience members wishfully identify with shōjo heroines.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are long-term relationships that audience members form with media characters and persona, in which the audience member enacts a one-sided relationship with the media figure much as he or she would relate to a real person. Audience members involved in a parasocial relationship with shōjo manga heroines would experience a variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral phenomena depending on the level of intensity and involvement they develop with the heroine (Klimmt 295). Just as individuals automatically form first impressions of new acquaintances, audience members develop first impressions of media persona based on their character attributes and mediated by specific knowledge of other roles the actor may have played or their real-world celebrity life-style. Similarly, shōjo manga readers develop first impressions of shōjo heroines mediated by other visually similar heroines they may have read which were created by the same author or similarities the new heroine may demonstrate with other heroines the audience member has read. By performing a natural but multi-step process starting with focusing their attention on the heroine and developing this first impression and leading to evaluating the heroine's characteristics and developing an ongoing comparison between the heroine and themselves, audience members construct a parasocial relationship with the heroine (Klimmt 297-298).

Media persona are more likely to generate these parasocial relationships if the media persona is strongly featured, "the more noticeable a persona within a media product is [measured through single protagonists with frequent close-ups], the more

probable are intense parasocial responses from the viewers” (Klimmt 301).

Additionally, media personas are more likely to generate parasocial interactions if they are visually represented and address the audience directly (Klimmt 301).

Shōjo heroines are typically the lead protagonists with the hero as a supporting character and friends/family/classmates relegated to side characters. Since shōjo is in comic book format, the artists are able to incorporate numerous close-ups of the heroine’s face and eyes, conveying her emotions through her expression. Shōjo heroines occasionally address the readers and the artists directly address the readers in every chapter, offering insights into her life, the creation of the manga, and the character’s background information.

In their research on parasocial relationships, *Parasocial Interactions and Relationships* (2006), communication scholars Christoph Klimmt, Tilo Hartmann, and Holger Schramm delineate the type of effects parasocial relationships can generate in audiences, several of which directly apply to shōjo manga. Parasocial relationships can generate both emotional and behavioral responses, as audience members engage with the media persona. Emotional responses are typically *empathetic reactions* in which “viewers may experience (virtually) the same emotions as a persona is expressing,” *persona-generated emotions* in which observing the persona causes the viewer to experience some emotion, and *mood contagion* in which the persona’s mood is automatically and unintentionally absorbed by the viewer (Klimmt 298-299). Behavioral responses are typically physical activity such as *mimicking* or *gestures* in which the viewer incorporates repeated or unique actions demonstrated by the persona,

and *verbal utterances* in which audience members talk to the characters, about the characters, and/or repeat trademark words or phrases that the persona uses (Klimmt 299-300). My preliminary analysis suggests that shōjo manga readers develop parasocial relationships with the heroines and demonstrate several of these emotional and behavioral effects.

In order to gain a better understanding of shōjo manga's reception in American girlhood culture and the nature of readers' parasocial relationships with shōjo heroines, I will conduct a brief survey of shōjo readers and analyze audience-generated message boards in order to ascertain readers' relationship with the genre and with the heroines. Because shōjo manga are often recreated as anime – animated TV versions – the survey and my analysis of message boards will deal concurrently with the manga series and their anime versions.

Audience Survey

I recruited survey respondents through contacts in anime clubs and groups, including, but not limited to the Texas A&M University anime club, *Aggime*, and the large Dallas Anime Club, *A-Kon Dallas*. This voluntary survey was internet based through SurveyMonkey.com, approximately 20-30 minutes long, and was emailed to members of these clubs through my contacts with the club leaders/organizers. This survey is designed to explore how readers understand these works, their messages, characters, and themes, and what enjoyment readers derive from shōjo manga. This survey asks a series of questions to ascertain the respondent's exposure to shōjo manga, their manga purchasing behavior, their favorite series, their enjoyment and

understanding of the heroines, their level of identification with the heroine, and their consideration of shōjo manga in relation to other girlhood entertainment.

Exposure to Shōjo Manga. The first set of questions established the reader's exposure to shōjo manga. Only survey results from respondents who affirm that they have read or watched shōjo manga/anime will be included in the results of this survey. By asking a series of questions to ascertain the respondents' frequency and duration of exposure to shōjo – when they started and/or stopped reading/watching shōjo, the survey provides a basic demographic of how involved readers are, and possibly, how new readers and seasoned readers interact differently with shōjo.

Favorite Series. In order to establish the respondent's personal preferences within the shōjo genre the survey asked respondent to list their favorite series. I also asked respondents to indicate which popular series (from a list I provided) they had either read or watched, and how much they liked the heroine from the series they were familiar with to assess the breadth of the respondent's shōjo exposure and their preferences within the genre. Respondents were also asked to name their favorite shōjo heroine, and to assess their relationship with her during the *Identification* and *Parasocial Relationship* questions which directly followed.

Knowledge of Shōjo. The next section asked respondents to self-report on their knowledge of shōjo. Respondents were asked to assess their own knowledge of shōjo on a five-point Likert-type scale with answers ranging from *Very knowledgeable – I've read/watched extensively in this genre and I know what series, artists, and publishers are good*, to *Hardly knowledgeable – I'm only just getting into this genre*.

Ownership Behavior. In order to determine the respondent's level of commitment to and involvement in shōjo, respondents were asked to report the number of titles they had obtained in the past year and the manner through which s/he obtained them, which are measured by the number of shōjo titles *Purchased*, *Received as Gift*, or *Obtained Through Other Free Venue*. This section repeats this question for shōjo movies, shōjo manga, and shōjo anime series DVDs.

Enjoyment of Shōjo & Heroine. Next, the survey has a series of questions concerning respondents' enjoyment and perception of shōjo manga/anime. Respondents were first asked an open-ended question, *What draws you to this genre? In other words, what do you like about shōjo?* Then, respondents were asked to evaluate the following nine characteristics, *Heroine's Personality*, *Plots*, *Humorous Elements*, *Artistry/Aesthetics*, *Love Triangles*, *Beautiful Boys*, *Beautiful Girls*, *Japanese Cultural Elements*, and *Recurring Themes*, on a five point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Like* to *Strongly Dislike*.

Next, the survey asked respondents to consider the nature of shōjo heroines. This was divided into two sections, the first deals with the *typical* heroine and the second with the respondent's *ideal* heroine. These questions were based on my preliminary analysis of shōjo heroines, and were intended to establish the respondent's understanding of and appreciation for the heroine. Respondents were first asked to consider if they agree that thirteen characteristics, *Perseverance*, *Optimism*, *Encouraging*, *Friendliness*, *Kindness*, *Self-Sacrificial*, *Boldness*, *Determination*, *Loyalty*, *Domesticity*, *Values Life*, *Intelligent*, *Humorous*, and *Silly/Ditzy* describe a typical shōjo heroine on a five point Likert scale

ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. And finally, respondents were asked to consider if they agree that those thirteen characteristics would be important if they were creating their *ideal* shōjo heroine on a five point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*.

Identification with the Heroine. I used the measure of identification with television personalities, developed by Eyal and Rubin (2003), which was appropriate for shōjo series. Respondents were asked to rate on a 5 point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: *I wish I could be more like my FAVORITE shōjo heroine; I'd like to do the kinds of things my FAVORITE shōjo heroine does; and When I read or watch my FAVORITE shōjo heroine, I imagine myself in her place.* Respondents were then specifically asked to consider on a five point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* the extent to which they agreed that they wanted to be more like their favorite shōjo heroine in the following areas: *Attitude, Actions, Character/Personality, Other – Please Specify.* Respondents were then asked if they have ever imitated a shōjo heroine's *Attitude, Actions, Character/Personality, Characteristic Gestures, Characteristic Phrases,* or *Other – Please Specify.* And finally, respondents were asked if they have ever *cosplayed* – dressed up in a costume and impersonated – a shōjo heroine.

Parasocial Relationship with Heroine. Using the parasocial interaction literature developed by Eyal and Rubin (2003), I assessed the extent to which respondents developed a parasocial interaction with shōjo heroines. Respondents were asked to rank

on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: *I look forward to watching/reading the next episode about my FAVORITE shōjo heroine; My FAVORITE shōjo heroine makes me feel comfortable – as if I were with my friends; If my FAVORITE shōjo heroine were in another series, I would want to read/watch it; If I saw a story about my FAVORITE shōjo heroine in a newspaper or magazine I would want to read it.* And finally, in keeping with the literature on parasocial relationships (Klimmt 2006), I asked respondents to rank on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: *I feel happy when the heroine is happy; I feel sad when the heroine is sad; I worry about what will happen to the characters in the next episode; I wish I could tell the characters what to do in some situations; I experience shock with the characters after a new plot development; I enjoy and reread/watch the romantic moments; and/or I dislike some side characters and villains.*

Comparison with Other Girlhood Entertainment. The survey asked respondents to compare shōjo to other American genres targeting young women. This establishes the respondent's overall opinion of shōjo in relation to other entertainment media. Respondents were first asked to compare shōjo manga to mainstream girlhood entertainment – such as movies starring Hillary Duff, Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana, and TV shows such as Gossip Girl. Respondents were asked to rank on a five point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* if shōjo manga/anime is more *Enjoyable, Hopeful, Realistic, Humorous, Encouraging, Uplifting* and/or *Silly* than these

texts, or if *they like other entertainment products as much or more than shōjo*.

Respondents were also asked to consider on a five point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree* if they agree that shōjo has *more interesting plots, Better Heroines, Heroes, Side Characters, Recurring Themes, Life Lessons, Portrayals of Romantic Relationships*, and/or *Better Artistry/Aesthetics* than mainstream girlhood entertainment texts. Respondents were then asked the same questions in specific relation to fantasy entertainment (Twilight Series, Buffy the Vampire Slayer) marketed to girls.

Closing Questions. This survey concluded with open ended questions concerning what respondents like best about shōjo and what they wish they could change.

Audience-Generated Message Boards

To gain further insight into how shōjo readers/watchers interact with and understand these texts, I will analyze message boards featuring my primary titles. I will primarily analyze the message boards posted on *One Manga Forum* – a message board forum in connection with *OneManga.com*, a website which provides fan-based translations of manga and online scans of manga texts. Additionally, I will draw from other message board forums such as *Tokyopop: Message Boards*, *FUNimation Forums*, and Facebook’s *Fruits Basket* message boards.

As fans, these message board contributors are often defined as having “excessive enthusiasm” (Gregson 129), and are involved in what Fiske (1989, 1992) identifies as “textual production” as well as textual consumption. These fans share “their cultural economy of fandom” – their textual productions - through these message boards and

through fan-fictions, fan-art, and series reviews (Gregson 129). I expect that many of these message boards will dwell on the romantic developments and demonstrate involvement in the relationship between the heroine and hero as Kimberly Gregson found in her 2005 study of shōjo websites, *What if the Lead Character Looks Like Me? Girl Fans of Shōjo Anime and Their Websites*. However, fans also discuss their opinions on the heroine, supporting characters, plots, humorous content, artistry, and general relationship with manga/anime on these message boards. In keeping with the theories of Parasocial Relationships and Wishful Identification, I will analyze these message boards to see how audience members characterize their interactions with shojo heroines: references to conceptualizing the heroines as their friends, describing emotional responses elicited by the heroines, and re-reading/watching the heroine indicate parasocial relationships and references to imitating, wanting to be like the heroines, and similarities between the audience member and the heroine are indicative of wishful identification.

This audience analysis, using both a survey and message board analysis will offer the girls' voices as they discuss why they purchase, read, and enjoy shōjo manga, as well as revealing how audience members perceive and relate to shōjo heroines and their perception of shōjo in relation to other girlhood entertainment. This will provide us with a better understanding of shōjo's reception in American girlhood culture.

CHAPTER IV

SHŌJO'S MASTER NARRATIVE

Although shōjo has innumerable series, the same master narrative asserts itself over the vast majority of these stories: remarkably similar heroines encounter identical plot devices. The master narrative that dominates this genre is of a disadvantaged but cheerful teenage girl who lives alone, has few – but close – friends at school, encounters a lonely boy, develops a friendship/romance with him, and overcomes social injustices to achieve happiness, which she spreads to everyone around her. This master narrative imbues each of these series with surprisingly strong pro-feminist messages as these heroines successfully navigate their lives. Like American fantasy girlhood entertainment such a *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight*, shōjo has two primary areas (the heroine's characteristics and the narrative structure) for feminist opportunities. Shōjo utilizes both areas to create a feminist text: the heroines are characterized by their autonomy and agency and the narrative structure functions to support their agency.

Following Foucault's assessment that "power is everywhere in every relation" (Foucault 93), feminist scholars suggest that the socialized genders are continually vying for, exercising, and abusing power, and that these power negotiations are prominently featured in fictional works. Given our patriarchal society, fiction and reality often establish men as the clear possessors and rightful heirs of power. Feminism strives to achieve balance in these power relations – which requires the end of patriarchy. Balanced power relations means an equal distribution of power between the sexes and equality in the socially constructed roles that men and women perform in

society. In analyzing shōjo, I focus on how shōjo challenges traditional gender roles and equally distributes power to its male and female characters through a variety of rhetorical methods: the heroines' character traits, the romantic relationships, the plot structure, and the recurring narrative features.

In addition to being pro-feminist, shōjo is explicitly *pro-social*, meaning that it actively seeks to encourage pro-social behaviors, behaviors that are “desirable and beneficial to other individuals and/or to society at large (Singhal and Rogers 91). This pro-social impulse is demonstrated in shōjo by the inherent goodness of the heroine and dialogue in which she explicitly teaches the supporting characters how to imitate her behaviors and attitudes – literally teaching pro-sociality. Pro-sociality is an important characteristic for the shōjo heroine because it empowers her with social success and personal happiness rarely afforded to American fantasy heroines.

As a genre, shōjo manga features predominantly feminist and pro-social messages through its reoccurring character types, plot structure, and other narrative features. The six texts, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, *Absolute Boyfriend*, *Backstage Prince*, *Sand Chronicles*, and *Imadoki!* each portray the feminist model of balancing power between male and female characters, granting the female protagonist an identity apart from her relationships with male characters, and granting her agency. Simultaneously, these texts promote the pro-social values of love, sacrifice, endurance, forgiveness, and optimism by featuring protagonists who embody these qualities while maintaining an “every-girl” persona with which readers can easily identify.

My analysis focuses on these feminist rhetorical elements, addressing the heroine's empowering characteristics and then the supporting narrative structure. However, shōjo naturally also has limitations – areas for improvement – and I will close this analysis with a consideration of the limitations and constraints of shōjo's rhetoric. Ultimately, this study focuses on the explicit and latent messages propagated by shōjo. These six texts, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, *Absolute Boyfriend*, *Sand Chronicles*, *Backstage Prince*, and *Imadoki!* are published in a patriarchal world and each explicitly contributes to gender relations as they present empowered heroines.

Overview of Texts

These six stories feature overwhelmingly feminist and pro-social similarities while maintaining very different plots; hence, while the messages and values remain stable, the stories change providing suspense, new humorous elements, and pseudo-fresh plots and characters to interest readers. I will briefly describe the storyline of each text to demonstrate shōjo's variety of plots and settings and then analyze and explicate the reoccurring rhetorical elements that address gender relations.

Fruits Basket centers around a recently orphaned high-school student named Tohru Honda who moves in with her male classmates Yuuki and Kyo Soma who suffer from a bizarre family curse: when hugged by members of the opposite sex they transform into the animals of the Chinese Zodiac. Originally, both boys are socially isolated and emotionally stunted and the story focuses on Tohru's beneficial influence in their lives. *Vampire Knight* focuses on an orphaned girl, Yuuki Cross, who attends a boarding school where half the students are vampires. The protagonist, Yuuki, although

enamored with the Vampire President, Kaname Kuran, chooses to spend her time (and blood) caring for Zero, a half-vampire she originally thinks of as an older brother in this gothic and occasionally erotic story. *Absolute Boyfriend* features a high-school girl, Riiko Izawa, who fears she will never have a boyfriend and, therefore, orders an android she names Night from the “Lover Shop” website. *Backstage Prince* focuses on a high-school student, Akari, who falls in love with Ryusei Horiuchi a pop star of Japanese Theater. *Sand Chronicles* features a high-school protagonist named Ann Uekusa as she tries to make sense of life after her mother’s suicide. And finally, *Imadoki!* features a poor girl named Tampopo Yamazaki who attends the most prestigious high-school in Japan on a charity scholarship, and who befriends Koki Kogyo – the isolated heir to fortunes – while surviving the bullying of her wealthy, cruel class-mates. These six very different shōjo plots feature protagonists with the same personality and similar narrative structures recur in each of the texts.

Like American fantasy entertainment, these heroines are initially socially disadvantaged: they, like Buffy, Kim, and Bella, are outsiders at their schools who develop a small group of close-knit friends. Also, like the American fantasy heroines, these shōjo heroines have non-traditional relationships with their (absent) parents; however, Buffy, Kim, and Bella each experience tension with and are often constrained by their parents, whereas these shōjo heroines operate autonomously due to their absent or non-traditional parents.

Portrait of the Pro-Social Heroine

Shōjo heroines resemble each other, having identical characteristics and similar life-histories. Hence by exploring the standard features of shōjo heroines we can understand their rhetorical contribution. Heroines commonly embody pro-social character traits while maintaining an “every-girl” persona, managing the repercussions of a tragic past, merging the social constructions of masculinity and femininity, and embodying cross-cultural archetypes.

Pro-sociality

The heroines embody the pro-social characteristics they actively promote throughout the story. Therefore, the heroines have the same core personality of perseverance, optimism, selflessness, friendliness, encouragement, and a strong belief in the value and preciousness of life. The heroines differ from each other only by degree. They each maintain the same pro-social base personality and then highlight one or two of the qualities. For instance, *Vampire Knight*'s heroine, Yuuki Cross epitomizes self-sacrifice and loyalty to her friends (Figure 1), while *Imadoki!*'s heroine, Tampopo embodies friendliness and perseverance in the face of opposition. In *Sand Chronicles*, Ann Uekusa exemplifies valuing life as precious, especially in the reality of her mother's recent suicide (Figure 2), while Tohru Honda, the heroine of *Fruits Basket*, showcases all of these pro-social qualities. In a tour-de-force, Tohru Honda displays more perseverance, optimism, friendliness, encouragement, selflessness and belief in life's inherent value than any human being could ever hope to achieve – and, not coincidentally, Tohru Honda's series, *Fruits Basket*, is the top selling shōjo manga in



Figure 1: Sacrificial Heroine

Yuki sacrificially offers her blood to heal Zero (Hino, Vol 2, 2007).



Figure 2: Heroines Value Life

Ann contemplates the shortness and preciousness of life (Ashihara 52-53, 2008).

America. These shōjo heroines embody pro-social characteristics and unfailingly act in the interest of others.

This pro-sociality is a marketable quality: shōjo heroines appeal to their audience through their sheer goodness and exemplary behavior. Moreover, they cultivate these pro-social behaviors in their supporting characters and particularly in their romantic interest. This super-heroic goodness, their perfection of pro-social behaviors and attitudes, ultimately empowers the heroines. By developing the character traits of perseverance, loyalty, determination, optimism, selflessness, friendliness, encouragement, and an understanding of the preciousness of life, the heroines have the internal strength and resources to contend with villainesses and other powerful characters.

This heightened pro-sociality is in contrast with Fantasy girlhood heroines such as Buffy, Kim, and Bella who are undoubtedly good people yet lack the intensity of pro-sociality these shōjo heroines demonstrate. Shōjo heroines usually make a grand entrance of optimism and friendliness and they literally burst onto the page or screen, bursting with self-assured happiness. Consider Tampopo from *Imadoki!*: the first page is of the male protagonist, Koki trudging down a path, the heavy shading implying darkness and winter; the next page is a two-page feature of Tampopo – the heroine – air-born on a bike with a giant smile and bright eyes, the background is brightly colored with a flower-like texture that creates a feeling of lightness, buoyancy, and fun. In the next sequence of pages, Tampopo encounters Koki and he is originally drawn with angry, frustrated facial expressions and dark backgrounds which contrast with

Tampopo's smiles and brightness, until slowly Koki's darkness and unhappiness – under Tampopo's influence – gives way to her brighter backgrounds and expressions (*Imadoki!* 1.1-14). Shōjo heroines are marked by a contagious optimism which contrasts sharply with fantasy heroines such as Buffy who often maintains a dismal attitude and sad or sarcastic expression. Unlike fantasy heroines, shōjo heroines are happy for the vast majority of the narrative. Shōjo empowers heroines by portraying them as contagiously happy: these heroines are glad to be alive, their worlds are not apocalyptic (like Buffy's) or desolate without their boyfriend (like Bella's); and rather than spreading danger and social difficulties to their friends (like Buffy brings to Xander and Willow, and Bella inflicts on her parents) these heroines infect their friends with joy, pleasure, and optimism.

The Every-Girl Heroine

Like the fantasy heroines, shōjo artists carefully depict each shōjo heroine, despite her super-heroic, pro-social character qualities, as an “every-girl.” All six heroines have exceptionally average demographics. They are not particularly wealthy, beautiful, talented, academic, or popular. If anything, these girls are disadvantaged in their everyday existence, being poorer than their peers (Figure 3). They are especially disadvantaged in comparison to their romantic rivals, the villainesses, who are unfailingly wealthy, beautiful, talented, popular, and sexually mature women. These careful depictions of the “average-ness” of the heroine at the beginning of the series and the occasionally recurring reminders of their “normalcy” allows the artists to create true heroines under the guise of the “every-girl.” Readers can wholly identify with the



Figure 3: Disadvantaged Heroine

Tanpopo is disadvantaged in her new school because she is poorer and less prestigious than her classmates (Watase, *Imadoki!* 30, 2004).

heroine as a disadvantaged teenaged girl while aspiring to her strength of character. This element ties in with Fisher's Narrative Paradigm as the heroines are positioned as every-girls – someone with whom the audience can identify. Moreover, since the heroines are disadvantaged by comparison to the other characters, their values, hopes and general perspective falls into line with the audiences' as, generally speaking, teenage girls often feel disadvantaged in comparison to some elite group at school or society. Thus, broadly speaking, the audience members can identify with the heroines' values, hopes, and perspective. Audience members confirmed this in both the survey and message board analysis as discussed later.

Range of Control

The heroines have control only over themselves – their settings, circumstances, and the actions of others are beyond their control. Therefore, the heroines excel only in their own domain: their own personalities. The heroines are exemplary only because of their character attributes, which they carefully role model to the other characters and, by extension, to the readers. While Buffy and Kim Possible had control over their physicality – their heroism stems from their physical prowess – shōjo heroines have control over their personality and their heroism stems from their character.

In a complicated rhetorical element, the artists have narratively empowered the heroines through their pro-social characteristics and self-perfected personalities. At the surface level, the heroines seem like improbable feminist role models since their pro-social characteristics, such as friendliness, encouragement, and selflessness, are also traditionally feminine traits, so the heroines seem to succeed by being “girly.”

Moreover, the heroines have a clearly delineated, constricted realm of control: themselves. However, counter-intuitively, these elements function to empower the heroines: since the artists narratively define the qualities of friendliness, encouragement, and selflessness as crucial elements of *human* health and wellbeing. The heroines are portrayed as holistic and healthy (not girly) and they teach the male characters how to develop these necessary qualities.

For example, Tohru Honda, an inherently encouraging heroine teaches Kyo, an angry and frustrated boy how to believe in himself and be encouraging to others through a whimsical story: In a town, there are little rice-balls (which represent people) with plums (which represent admirable qualities) on their backs – so they cannot see their own plums. The rice-ball people walk around rice-ball town and see everyone else's plums but look at themselves and feel plain and ugly. She then explains to Kyo that she can see the plum on his back and thinks he is admirable, encouraging him to appreciate himself more. At this point in the narrative (episode seven of twenty-six), Kyo has never successfully said anything nice to anyone, and the narrative has pointed out that he cannot encourage others, because he does not know how to (episode 3). After listening to Tohru's encouraging story, Kyo learns how to encourage others and he repeats back to Tohru that he can see the plum on her back, taking his first (of many) steps toward pro-sociality (episode 7).

Although side characters (such as the villains) can control other characters and/or the setting, they are portrayed as personally incomplete and have no self-determination/agency. For example, *Sand Chronicles*' villainess, Ayumu Narasaki, can

control the setting – in the first volume she steals an important item, forcing other characters to respond to her machinations. However, her actions are quickly undone (the stolen item is recovered) leaving her looking foolish and achieving the opposite of her intended results: the boy in question grows even more attached to the heroine instead of falling in love with her. These villains have access to traditional power sources (wealth, prestige, social connections, etc), yet they never successfully affect their own futures – they lack agency, the power to choose their own futures. The heroines are the only characters who have control over themselves and their own futures. This enables them to act freely, regardless of the circumstances, and to liberate others: heroines teach others how to make decisions for themselves, to extricate themselves from unwanted engagements and/or careers and choose their own lifestyle.

This is in contrast to fantasy girlhood heroines who rarely have control over their own futures. While Buffy and Kim Possible always respond to outside forces (new villains and apocalypses) which keep them from planning their own futures – this is particularly constraining for Buffy who cannot finish college, pursue a normal career, or contemplate a serious relationship due to her role as Slayer – and Bella cannot enact her choice to become a vampire, these shōjo heroines decide their own futures.

Heroines' Tragic Past

Another key feature of most shōjo manga heroines is their tragic past. Most heroines are either orphans or unwanted children sent away from the family home. They vulnerably express their pain and yet refuse to wallow in self-pity. Rather, they choose to focus on the positive elements and value life and others even more because they know

the pain of loss. The heroines' tragic pasts enhance their status as pro-social role-models: they experienced pain and yet choose to live encouraging lives, making their lifestyle a triumph of character and they can relate better to other characters (and by extension to the audience) who are dealing with difficult situations.

Bi-Gendered Heroines

When describing the standard shōjo manga heroine, one cannot omit the odd merger of traditional depictions of femininity and masculinity. The heroines are intensely hyper-feminine in their mannerisms and emotional nature. Yet they are empowered characters with the masculine traits of determination, loyalty, bravery, independence, and agency. Erving Goffman reminds us of the “unnatural” reality of femininity and masculinity, the optional nature of all gender displays, and that one performs gender through culturally created, ritualistic displays (Goffman 64, 66).

Drawing on Goffman's ritualistic understanding of gender performance and his categories of early warning functions, bracket rituals, and overlay rituals we can see that shōjo heroines incorporate both traditionally masculine and feminine rituals to merge these gender roles. Shōjo heroines exhibit hyper-feminine warning functions and bracket rituals, clearly performing femininity. The heroines portray an acute *kawaii* (cute) nature. *Kawaii* is a cultural term that means innocent, infantile, adorable, essentially cute and girly – for young women in Japan, *kawaii* is femininity (Shiokawa 94). The artists display shōjo heroines as *kawaii* through artistic decisions such as depicting them with giant round eyes, sparkles, and flower/bubble backgrounds. Moreover the shōjo heroines make *kawaii* motions, they clasp their hands and scrunch

their faces when hopeful, they are clumsy like toddlers, and they blush and cry easily. In so doing, the heroines perform the warning and bracket rituals of Japanese femininity – *kawaiiness*. They signal from afar (early warning functions) that they are feminine through their clothing and hair choices and they bracket their interactions in feminine motions and gestures. However, shōjo heroines perform masculine overlay rituals – attitudes and behaviors that exist above the minutia of daily life. They make decisions, take action, persevere, act boldly, protect others, and assume their own autonomy – all traditionally masculine traits. Hence, shōjo heroines deviate from both traditional femininity and masculinity: these intensely “girly” heroines “never give up” (*Fruits Basket*). The heroines are unmistakably female, essentially girly, yet they act with strength and determination usually reserved for male characters.

Cross-Cultural Archetypes

Finally, by tapping into the archetypes of “self-seeking individuation,” “disobedient female,” and “heroic struggle” the heroines achieve cross-cultural viability. The heroines constantly differentiate themselves from society, establishing their own identities and embodying the “self-seeking individuation” archetype. By separating from friends and family (most of the heroines have recently relocated and live apart from their parents – if their parents are still alive), withdrawing from the dominant social cliques, and focusing on “being themselves” (*Fruits Basket*), the heroines enact self-seeking individuation which is the “process of claiming one’s unique self in opposition to the pulls of the collective” (Perlman 181).

The heroines embody the archetype of the “disobedient female” who “reshapes her world and that of others through her endurance, determination, and curiosity” by constantly challenging the oppressive authority structures (Singhal and Udornpim 174). Tohru Honda challenges the God of the Chinese Zodiac in *Fruits Basket*, Yuki Cross combats powerful vampires in *Vampire Knight*, and the other heroines resist oppressive authority figures and social systems to reshape their worlds.

Finally the heroines enact the archetype of “heroic struggle” in which heroic figures repeatedly subdue various foes. Difficulties and tragedies such as parental deaths, betrayals, illness, social constraints, rape threats, and the evil machinations of villainesses constantly assault the heroines who enact the heroic struggle and eventually overcome these difficulties. By embodying these three cross-cultural archetypes the heroines appeal to international audiences who can identify with the heroines.

Like fantasy heroines, much of shōjo heroines’ feminism stems from their characterization. Yet these shōjo heroines are far more successfully pro-feministly characterized since these happy girls exude confidence and perseverance while merging feminine and masculine gender traits and performing as “every-girls.”

Feminist Narrative Structure

Even as the heroines embody these feminist, pro-social attributes, establishing their autonomy by taking complete control of their attitudes and actions, the narrative structures and recurring features offer a feminist model of reality, a reality in which the genders equally share power. The artists achieve this balance by structuring their plots around the heroine’s ability to emotionally rescue men, the use of love triangles to grant

the heroine agency and choice, the absence of parental figures, which gives the heroine complete autonomy in her coming-of-age story, and the mutually selfless declarations of love between the heroine and her romantic interest. Unlike fantasy heroines whose feministic characterization was undermined by narrative structures which reestablished patriarchal hierarchies and challenged the heroines through overly hostile environments, shōjo's narrative structure usually functions to empower the heroine. The narrative structure also demonstrates a high level of *coherence*, the story lines make sense, the plots are complicated but complete, and generally speaking, the story hangs together despite its multi-volume, episodic nature.

Power Distribution

Shōjo narratives are structured by the heroine's ability to emotionally rescue the people she encounters, particularly her romantic interest. All six stories feature male protagonists who are barely human at the beginning of the story (Figure 4). The heroines invariably rescue these isolated, friendless, unhappy, distant, lonely, unexpressive men. The heroines' intervention enables these men to become not only relational and emotionally healthy, but usually also rescues them from loveless arranged marriages and unfulfilling careers. For example, in *Imadoki!*, the heroine, Tanpopo, befriends Koki, not only helping him to express his own emotions, explore hobbies, and develop his first friendships, but also gives him the courage to terminate an unwanted engagement and pursue his own career path. In the more fantasy oriented stories, the heroines often have the additional power of resolving magical elements. For example, in *Fruits Basket*, Tohru Honda is integral to rescuing the boys from the Zodiac Curse. The



Figure 4: Emotionally Stunted Heroes

Ryusei's boss explains that Ryusei is incapable of basic human interactions (Sakurakoji 17, 2007).

storylines hinge around the heroines' power to rescue men from isolation and emotional estrangement.

The heroines' romantic interests (the heroes) are universally endowed with traditional power sources: wealth, prestige, family, physical attractiveness, and strength. The men have power in the traditional sense, especially in comparison to the heroines' comparative lack of these traditional power sources. This is not unlike *Buffy* or *Twilight* where Buffy and Bella love vampire men who wield inordinate strength and power. However, unlike these fantasy heroines, shōjo heroines' strength of character – their emotional stability, determination, optimism, creativity, and loyalty not only makes up for their lack of traditional power, but makes them more powerful characters than their romantic interests. In each of these shōjo narratives, the men are dependant upon the heroines: they need the heroines to rescue them. Although the men have easy access to external power sources, they are lacking when compared to the heroine's power, which she derives from internal power sources.

While the heroines emotionally rescue the heroes, the heroes, in turn, physically rescue the heroines: the heroines, recurrently clumsy or given to sudden illnesses, constantly fall down, giving the men an opportunity to catch them⁸ (Figure 5). I will address the fact that this portrayal of women as emotionally empowered and men as physically powerful affirms traditional notions of femininity and masculinity later in this analysis.

⁸ This is known as the "flirtatious fall" – not because the heroines flirt by falling down, but because the heroes catch them and the physical proximity often leads to romantic interest.



Figure 5: Fainting Heroines

Koki catches Yuki as she passes out from a fever (Watase, *Imadoki!* 103, 2004).

Love-Triangles: Agency in Action

The artists grant the heroines true agency, the power to freely choose and act, through the recurring narrative feature of love triangles. Love triangles recur as a stock motif in many romantic stories, but shōjo has a particular rendition of the love triangle. All six stories feature love triangles in which the heroine freely chooses between two equally dedicated, attractive, good men (Figure 6). This models active choice. Unlike fantasy narratives which follow the western comic book tradition of staging a love triangle and then killing off one of the rival men or removing the choice by obvious defect,⁹ shōjo lets the heroine freely choose between two equally good options. This functions to heighten the suspense and create dramatic tension. The artists could choose anything (forbidding parents, illness, etc) to create dramatic tension, yet they all chose to use love triangles which position the heroine in an empowered situation choosing between two equally loving and worthy men. This suggests that the true function of the love triangle is to empower the heroine, modeling women's right to choose their romantic partner based on their own feelings and judgments, regardless of the situation and without authoritative manipulation.

Autonomy and Absent Parents

The artists structured these stories as coming-of-age narratives with a complete absence of parental figures. In three of the stories, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, and *Sand Chronicles*, the parents have died leaving the heroine orphaned for the duration of

⁹ Just as Lois Lane “chose” between virtuous Superman and the evil Lex Luther, in the first season Buffy “chose” between the gorgeous and mysterious Angel and her Xander her clumsy, awkward friend, and in *New Moon* and *Eclipse* Bella “chose” between Edward the vampire she loved with all of her being and Jacob her friend.



Figure 6: Love Triangles
Both boys, Kyo and Yuki are in love with Tohru Honda (*Fruits Basket*).

the series. In *Absolute Boyfriend*, the parents took an extended overseas business trip, explaining their complete absence for their daughter's life during this series. In *Imadoki!*, the heroine moved away from her family home in rural Japan, to live alone in Tokyo and attend the most prestigious high school. Only in *Backstage Prince* does the heroine live at home with both parents, but neither the parents nor the family home ever appear in the course of this series. The heroines get part-time jobs, fall in love, develop friendships, experience high school, manage complicated relationships with lovers, rivals, enemies, and rejected suitors all without parental supervision. The heroines act autonomously: they are agents with the power and responsibility to determine their own futures.

This contrasts with the male characters who experience domination by their parents: all the male characters have parents and nearly all of these parents control their sons and attempt to force them into unwanted marriages and careers. The complete absence of authority figures in the heroine's life allows her to exhibit unmediated agency; she has complete power over her actions, attitudes, and behaviors. This functions in two specific ways: first, it models a feminist ideal of reality in which women have agency and self-determination, and secondly, it emphasizes the inherent nature of the heroine's pro-social values – she is free to act in any way she pleases, yet she chooses to act pro-socially and in consideration of others.

The heroines' autonomy also contrasts with the heroines in fantasy girlhood texts such as *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight*. In fantasy narratives, the heroines are usually guided by overbearing authority figures (such as Giles in *Buffy*), constrained by overly

protective parents (such as Buffy's mother and Bella's father), or overshadowed by possessive boyfriends (such as Edward in *Twilight*). Kim Possible is the most autonomous of the fantasy heroines, but even she is often constrained by her familial relations as she baby-sits her brothers and answers to parental authorities. This undermines fantasy heroines' agency since they cannot act independently while authority figures constantly make their choices for them.

Equitable Love

Finally, each of these stories feature romantically climactic moments in which the heroine and her love interest mutually declare their selfless love for each other by stating, "I'll always be *by your side*" or variations thereof (emphasis added *Backstage Prince*, vol 2, 59). This directly contrasts with many Western love stories, such as teen sensation Hillary Duff's 2005 movie *The Perfect Man*, which culminates with the hero professing his love by stating, "life is better with you *by my side*" (emphasis added *The Perfect Man*). This also contrasts with fantasy entertainment such as *Buffy* and *Twilight* where love is similarly self-oriented, although generally understood in the more dire iteration, "*I can't live without you.*"

In contrast, shōjo's emphasis in romantic climaxes is on the *mutual* declaration of abiding devotion to the other and committing oneself to the other's happiness and wellbeing. In so doing, the characters model a relationship of mutual sacrifice and love, bringing balance and equality to their gendered relations.

Limitations and Areas for Improvement

Naturally, all texts are constrained or limited by cultural and social structures and, therefore, have room for improvement. Shōjo is no different. Although it achieves rare heights in popular culture by featuring pro-social heroines with true agency and modeling balanced power relationships, it occasionally participates in the sexual objectification of men, casts sexually mature women as femme fatales, limits the heroine through her *kawaii* (cute) nature, and needs more variety to resolve the stereotypical balance of women emotionally rescuing men while men physically rescue women.

Sexually Objectified Men

Popular culture is usually a site of female sexual objectification; this is historically true of American comic books and of fantasy heroines. However, in shōjo, the artists invite the female gaze to linger on the male characters by featuring them in dramatic, sexy poses both in the narrative and in “filler sketches.”¹⁰ These filler sketches often feature a male character in sensual poses, dripping in sweat, inviting sexual objectification. While this can be heralded as a moment of female sexual liberation, as women are invited to gaze upon the male body, it also strips male characters of their agency, featuring them as static, sexualized beings. Just as feminists critique popular culture for portraying women in purely sexual manners due to its detrimental effects upon gender relations, the same principle should hold true for male objectification as well.

¹⁰ Since chapters almost always start on the left page, artists occasionally have a blank page right before the new chapter. Rather than leave this page blank, artists typically draw a “filler sketch” – typically a sketch of one or more of the characters that has no bearing on the plot line.

Femme Fatales and *Kawaii* Heroines

Aside from sexually objectifying men, shōjo repeatedly casts sexually mature women as femme fatales and simultaneously limits the heroine by her girlish nature. Although shōjo heroines are moving into the realm of active, powerful heroines (becoming “agents” in their own right), they maintain their infantile appearance and characteristic “cuteness” (*kawaii*). Meanwhile, villainesses have taken the opposing center stage as active, all-powerful, evil destructive forces. These villainesses are devastatingly beautiful, impossibly buxom, and ooze sexuality and seduction across the pages. Shōjo needs to overcome this cultural conceptualization which equates *kawaii* with femininity and sexuality with evil; it needs to broaden its depictions of femininity and allow sexually mature characters to be positive role models and depict *kawaii* girls in more realistic terms (Shiokawa 119-121).

Stereotypical Strengths

Finally, the awkward balance achieved by heroines emotionally rescuing men and men physically rescuing heroines needs expansion and variation. Although this current situation achieves balance in the power relationship, its perpetual reiteration enforces the dominant social construction of femininity as emotionally capable and masculinity as physically capable. In and of itself, this model is not negative, but as it dominates all representations of femininity and masculinity it obliterates other versions of reality. Realities in which men are emotionally mature and women are physically equipped. Realities in which women have external power sources and men derive their power from internal sources. Realities in which men and women are equally matched in

emotional maturity, access to external/internal power sources, and physical strength.

Shōjo needs to explore other possibilities that achieve balance in power relations in order to offer more representative depictions of men and women.

A Feminist Master Narrative

As shōjo continues to develop in American popular culture, achieving a broader readership, it offers a uniquely positive representation of women in the comic book genre. By creating a pro-social heroine and implementing narrative structures and recurring features that empower the heroine, shōjo artists create feminist texts that appeal to women in an increasingly international context.

Within the constraints of patriarchal societies (which perhaps explains the continuation of *kawaii* heroines and sexually mature villainesses) shōjo artists created pro-social heroines with rich internal power sources, who exhibit supernatural determination, loyalty, bravery, optimism, and friendliness while embodying an “every-girl” persona that blends standard social constructions of femininity and masculinity. Simultaneously, the artists implemented narrative structures and features which empower the heroine: the plot revolves around the heroines’ ability to emotionally rescue men, the love triangles grant the heroines agency and self-determination by enabling them to choose between two equally good men, the absence of parental figures empowers the heroines to act with authority and responsibility in their coming-of-age stories, and the mutually selfless declarations of love cement the balance of sexual politics between the heroine and her romantic interest.

Significantly more research needs to focus on manga as this genre achieves greater resonance and broader audiences and as manga sub-genres develop and blend with each other. The causes, implications, and possible solutions to shōjo's limitations need further analysis as does the audience effects and responses to shōjo manga.

Ultimately, despite its limitations, shōjo offers an excitingly feminist alternative to the majority of comic books and the broader realm of popular culture. Female artists have developed an empowering representation of reality which culminates by bringing balance to the sexual politics between the male and female characters. Shōjo has captured a female audience by depicting empowered yet “every-girl” heroines and narratives of feminist liberation and cross-cultural, pro-social values in an entertaining genre of popular culture.

CHAPTER V

GENDER BENDERS AND AMERICAN GIRLHOOD

Within this growing genre of shōjo, an interesting subgenre of *Gender Benders* exists. The title *Gender Bender* is a self-referencing term for stories which feature heterosexual romances where one (or more) of the protagonists cross-dress, literally “bending” gender as a category. Although gender bending has a strong presence in Western narratives, shōjo manga has reached new heights in its proliferation of these stories, the intensity with which the characters contemplate gender, and the marketability of these products to American, female adolescents. By analyzing the rhetorical methods used in shōjo Gender Benders circulated in America, we can better understand their nature and effect on American girlhood.

Primarily concerned with issues of gender construction and gender identity, my analysis will principally feature standard shōjo Gender Benders – Japanese comic books which target female adolescents and feature a cross-dressing protagonist who becomes involved in a heterosexual romance – such as the series *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*. These stories derive their narrative impetus from the cross-dressing situation: without a cross-dressing protagonist, there is no story.

Hana-Kimi, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club* are all best selling Gender Benders within the American market and were all published by VIZ Media – one of the leading importers of Japanese manga (Kelts 20). Each of these series presents a different aspect of the Gender Bender genre, and together they are representative of the

genre.¹¹ These three texts will form the primary material for my analysis as I consider issues of gender construction and identity, evaluating the messages and rhetorical methods at work in these texts. Through a close reading of these texts, informed by gender and feminist theories, I will consider the nature of these texts' messages, the successfulness of their rhetorical methods, and their implications for the female adolescent audience.

Contextualizing Gender Benders

In order to better understand Gender Benders, we must first turn to the historical and contextual aspects of gender bending in Japan and current cultural portrayals of cross-dressing in America. The Japanese social context influences the norms in which these texts were created and the American context influences their reception in American girlhood culture. Also, in both fiction and history, gender bending is connected to homosexuality and gender roles. By exploring these historical and cultural contexts we can better understand Gender Bender manga such as *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*.

Gender bending – the practice of cross-dressing, drag, and/or passing – has a long history in both American and Japanese history and fiction, and the three variations of gender bending (cross-dressing, drag, and passing) define genre. Using *Hana-Kimi* as an example, I will define these three related terms: cross-dressing, drag, and passing, which are escalating forms of gender bending, with cross-dressing as the least intense

¹¹ Although gender bending occurs across multiple manga genres as side-characters occasionally cross-dress, for the sake of analysis I am limiting my focus to the Gender Bender genre, in which a protagonist cross-dresses throughout the entire narrative.

and passing as the most intense form of gender bending, yet characters in fiction often slip between these three states of gender bending. In fiction, cross-dressing is usually based in external motivation, “rooted in practical necessity, [and] is a theatrical convention of which we [the audience] are always aware” (Drouin 23). *Hana-Kimi* is established as a cross-dressing narrative since the story opens with Mizuki cutting her hair and donning men’s clothes while explaining that she must disguise herself as a boy in order to view Sano perform the high-jump. Mizuki cross-dresses in relation to the audience.

Drag is a more intense form of cross-dressing because it “parodies heteronormativity; hence, it is usually comedic ... drag is ‘almost but not quite right,’ and it self-referentially draws attention to its not-quite-rightness” (Drouin 23). Other narrative characters are aware of the drag performance, aware of the performance of gender, “drag subverts gender norms because it highlights that the performance of gender constitutes its reality” (Drouin 27). Since Sano realizes that Mizuki is cross-dressed in the first volume, she performs in drag for him for the next twenty-two volumes. Her performance as a boy is “not quite right,” and Sano often tries to help her perform better, and yet her performance constitutes her gender in their reality – Sano and others primarily treat her as a boy.

Finally, “passing, an often dangerous and deadly serious matter, is neither parody nor an intentional exposure of normativity. The goal of passing is to avoid recognition of one’s status as other. It is a subversive infiltration of normativity in which the

performance of gender itself is disguised” (Drouin 23-24). Passing is dangerous¹² because of the social consequences one might experience if one’s actual sex were discovered. Mizuki successfully passes as a boy for the majority of her classmates, and she experiences some social punishments when revealed as a girl. We can see how individuals slip between these three aspects of gender bending in fiction since characters can be cross-dressed in relation to the audience, in drag in relation to some characters who are “in the know,” and passing for the rest of the characters.

Cross-dressing in Gender Bender manga often leads to seemingly homosexual romance: since either the hero or the heroine is cross-dressing, they both appear to be the same gender, thus enacting a homosexual relationship – although they know their true heterosexuality. This often generates two versions attraction: 1) *False Homosexual Attraction*: an individual is seemingly homosexually attracted to someone who appears to be the same sex – but is actually the opposite sex; and 2) *False Heterosexual Attraction*: an individual is seemingly heterosexually attracted to another person – who is actually passing – thus homosexual attraction.

Gender Bending and the Japanese

Japanese history from the 1600s forward can be broadly categorized into three periods, the Edo period from 1600-1868, the Meiji period from 1868-1912, and then the first half of the twentieth century. Broadly speaking, these three periods had significantly different conceptualizations of homosexuality:¹³ The Edo period (1600-

¹² Most fictional accounts of passing suggest that this is a dangerous activity as characters often face death penalties, exile, or social ostracism for having transgressed gender boundaries.

¹³ Until the twentieth century, the term “homosexuality” did not exist since “male-male sexuality and female-female sexuality were not conceptually linked in Japan” (Pelugfelder 5). Moreover, until the

1868) understood male-male sexuality as regular and socially acceptable; the Meiji period (1868-1921) under Western influence socially and legally rejected male-male sexuality; and the 20th century has seen a slow and grudging reacceptance of homosexuality.

Hence, Japan has a history of active homosexuality during the Edo period, their historic golden age: the samurai era. And homosexuality is deeply related to the samurai figure¹⁴ which functions as a national mythic figure the way the Cowboy functions for America. However homosexuality carries a current negative stigma which originated in the Meiji Period and has been slowly softening in modern times. Hence Gender Bender manga have a complex relationship with homosexuality as they both enact seemingly homosexual relationships and yet ultimately establish heterosexual romances. In so doing, they embrace historic representations of sexuality and yet generally remain within the current context of sexual discourse. This is perhaps most evident in *Kaze Hikaru*, a currently published Gender Bender set in the Edo period in which the junior samurai is actually a cross-dressing girl who develops a romantic relationship with her master samurai – thus playing on the well documented homosexual relations between samurai and yet reinscribing the relationship in heterosexuality.

Gender Bending in Western Literary Consciousness

Gender bending also has a dynamic history within Western mythology, literature, and fiction which is important to understand the cultural background American girls

twentieth century, male-male or female-female sexuality was not considered a “sexual orientation” since the Japanese did not adhere to “the notion that each individual possesses a deeply rooted personal identity based on the biological sex of the preferred sexual object or objects” (Pelugfelder 6).

¹⁴ Much like the Spartan warriors of ancient Greece, the Samurais practiced homosexuality as an act of loyalty and male bonding (Pelugfelder 18-19, 70-71).

bring to these Japanese texts.¹⁵ Perhaps our earliest account of gender bending in the Western world is Teiresias, the blind prophet of Greek Tragedy. As with all versions of Greek myths, there are several variations of how Teiresias came to be a blind prophet but the following is one of the more prominent versions cited by Apollodorus (iii 6.7) and Ovid (*Metamorphoses* iii. 320) among others. While traveling on Mount Cyllene, Teiresias saw two snakes mating and struck them with his staff. The goddess Hera punished him for animal cruelty by turning him into a woman. She/he lived as a woman for seven years, during which time she/he had children. Then, when again traveling on Mount Cyllene, she/he saw another pair of snakes mating and was rewarded by being transformed back into a man. Then Zeus and Hera began the age-old argument of which gender has more pleasure in sexual intercourse and turned to Teiresias since he/she had experienced both sides. Teiresias answered “If the parts of love-pleasure be counted ten/Thrice three go to women, one only to men” (qtd. in Graves 373), siding with Zeus. Hera struck him/her blind as a punishment for disagreeing with her, and Zeus gave him/her the gift of prophesy to compensate for his/her blindness (Graves 373). Teiresias is perhaps the most popular of Greek prophets appearing in numerous Greek tragedies, including *Oedipus the King*, *Antigone*, and *The Bacchae*. Although few American girls are familiar with this gender bending myth, it is important because it informs how gender bending is continually represented in Western narratives throughout history. Teiresias is transformed into a woman as a *punishment* – hence femininity is inherently

¹⁵ Although homosexuality, transgenderism, and gender bending has an important history in Western reality, since I am concerned with how Japanese Gender Bender manga are *received* in American culture, I will focus on their similarities with Western gender bender narratives which inform their reception.

constructed as less desirable than masculinity, and Teresias' transformations always occur after his/her involvement in *sexual occurrences* – linking transgenderism and sexuality.

Shakespearian dramas are the most popular series of gender bending narratives within Western culture, as the majority of Shakespeare's comedies feature gender bending at some point in the narrative. In discussing these Shakespearian comedies, however, we must remember that narrative instances of cross-dressing (such as Viola/Cesario in *Twelfth Night*, and Rosalind/Ganymede in *As You Like It*) "is rarely more than a 'writing back'" since "the [Elizabethan] practice of employing boy actors to play the woman's part" meant that any female character cross-dressing during the play was simply a boy playing a woman playing a boy (Drouin 23). Both Shakespeare and his original audience were aware of this double instance of gender bending which reestablishes the actual gender in a way that most modern audience reading the scripts or watching a mixed-gender theater troupe perform are not.

However, aside from the actual act of cross-dressed performances, modern readers and theater goers can involve themselves in the narrative instances of gender bending which continues to normalize cross-dressing in Western fiction. Shakespearian gender bending maintains the patriarchal structures demonstrated in the Teiresias myth, "While women characters pass in order to travel safely, to seek out lovers, and to acquire access to patriarchal power, men are forced to don drag for the entertainment of others ... drag and passing emasculate men and empower women" (Drouin 40). This reestablishes the basic hierarchy in which masculinity is privileged and femininity is an

unwanted gender and a disempowered class. In Shakespearian dramas we often see similar slippages from cross-dressing to drag to passing that is prevalent in Gender Bending manga, “*As You Like It* presents the most complex range of slippages of all the Shakespeare’s gender-bending plays” because Rosalind/Ganymede is “constantly accompanied by a someone who is already aware of *his* ‘true’ biological sex; therefore, *he* is almost always simultaneously passing to some people while *he* is in drag to others” (Drouin 45-46).

Gender bending continues to infuse Western media entertainment through Shakespearian remakes such as *She’s the Man* (a remake of *Twelfth Night*) and other popular narratives such as Disney’s *Mulan*. Although both of these modern narratives culminate in a heavy-handed attempt at gendered equality, they continue to promote the themes so prevalent in Greek mythology and Shakespeare’s dramas: 1) women cross-dress in order to achieve masculine power; 2) women cross-dress in relation to the audience but are usually in drag or passing to other characters; 3) women always return to their natural “femininity” after achieving their goals through masculinity; 4) heterosexual romances are predominantly featured; and 5) women experience some form of punishment for having passed as a man. This context constitutes American girls’ general understanding of cross-dressing and gender negotiation: a context of limitation, punishment, and a reestablishment of gender norms.

Gender bending has a complicated history in both Japan and America as instances of cross-dressing, drag, and passing conflate and overlap with each other and with instances of homosexuality and sexual attraction. Both this Japanese history and

these Western gender bending texts form the context for Gender Bender manga and influence how American girls approach these texts.

Brief Summary of Texts¹⁶

In order to orient ourselves before delving into an analysis of the recurrent themes in *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*, and their gender and power implications, I will provide a brief description of these texts. In *Hana-Kimi*, the protagonist, Mizuki, cross-dresses to attend an all boys' school so she can watch her athletic idol, Sano, perform the high-jump. In this narrative, Mizuki and Sano room together at their boarding school, and, unbeknownst to her, Sano discovers her female gender in the first book of this 23 book series. They develop a deep friendship constantly teetering towards romance while Mizuki attempts to maintain her transgendered masquerade. Complicating their relationship is a variety of background and familial angst, as well as their mutual friend, Nakatsu, who is immediately attracted to Mizuki – despite believing she is a boy – and who ultimately competes with Sano for her affections.

In *W Juliet*, the boy, Makoto, does the official cross-dressing, pretending to be a girl for the last two years of high school on a challenge issued by his father: if he can successfully cross-dress for two years he earns the right to pursue his own career choice – acting. Meanwhile the female protagonist, Ito, simply acts and dresses boyishly enough to be originally mistaken for a boy by nearly everyone in the series. The two protagonists are teammates on the school's drama club, and they quickly learn each

¹⁶ See Appendix B for a brief description of the characters and their roles, listed by series.

others' true genders and develop a secret romantic relationship. This story quickly establishes their mutual attraction and focuses on their enduring relationship – which culminates in marriage – against the background of career choices, familial drama, and romantic rivals.

The final series, *Ouran High School Host Club*, features Haruhi, the poorest girl at the elite Ouran High School who, originally mistaken for a boy by the all male Host Club, becomes enslaved to them and forced to cross-dress, participating as a Host who socially entertains the bored female students. The Host Club is originally comprised of six exceedingly elite boys who banded together in the hopes of community and who provide an elaborate dating service for their female classmates: they host the girls in exceedingly romantic settings (beach holidays, historic re-inactions, medieval costumes, etc), flirting equally with all of the girls and developing romantic interests in none. When Haruhi accidentally breaks an expensive vase, the Host Club forces her to serve as a Host to work off her debt – only later discovering her femininity. Several (possibly all) of her co-hosts develop romantic feelings for her and she is eventually paired with Tamaki – the Host Club President. Although this work is dominated by issues of gender identity and construction, class issues enter the discussion with significant weight as the elite boys constantly wonder about and worry over Haruhi's impoverished status.

Analysis of Gender Benders

Broadly speaking, these texts continue in the larger vain of shōjo manga: general female empowerment through depicting heroines who are agents in their own right and develop equitable relationships with the heroes. In *Hana-Kimi*, the heroine Mizuki is

widely acknowledged as the fastest track-and-field runner and she develops a balanced relationship with her roommate and romantic interest, Sano, in which they mutually help each other. He comforts her when she is lonely and helps her maintain her transgendered persona while she helps him return to high-jumping after an injury and repair his familial relationships. They both express their mutual need and respect for each other.

Similarly, in *W Juliet*, Ito (female) and Makoto (male) develop an equitable relationship in which they mutually support and help each other. Ito is a particularly powerful girl – well trained in martial arts and unusually tall – she acts confidently and boldly. Similarly, Makoto is physically and emotionally mature. They compliment each other on the stage – as acting partners – and in their personal lives as she helps him maintain his transgendered persona and relate to his father and he helps her develop her acting career and rescues her from sexual assaults.

Finally in *Ouran*, Haruhi personally discounts gender roles and focuses on academic success. She is depicted as a bold, forthright, successful individual with remarkable emotional maturity. Despite their occasionally sinister and exploitive attempts, the Host Club boys are drawn to her and find their first glimmers of friendship and security in their relationship with her. She continually rescues the boys from emotional distress by offering them friendship in her unaffected, forthright manner. She often helps the boys repair familial relationships and mature into healthier individuals. In return, the Host Club boys offer her social success, prestige, and through their

developing friendships, a sense of comfort and companionship. These texts offer imperfect attempts at equality and mutual support.

However, *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club* each approach cross-dressing differently: in *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki chooses to cross-dress, in *W Juliet* Makoto seizes it as his only chance to pursue an acting career, and in *Ouran* Haruhi is literally forced to cross-dress; these different impetuses create three very different approaches to cross-dressing and different relationships between the cross-dresser and her/his transgendered persona. In focusing on how these texts depict gender construction and identity, we can evaluate the messages and rhetorical methods at work in these texts to assess how cross-dressing affects these power relations. To begin, I focus my attention on how *Gender Bender*'s primary narrative features portray gender and if gender roles are affirmed or subverted.

Recurring Features within Gender Benders

These three texts, *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*, each prominently feature repetitive narrative features which contribute to gender identity and construction. I have organized these features into the categories of, 1) instances of cross-dressing, 2) straight romance, and 3) non-romantic relationships. In exploring these narrative features we can develop a better understanding of how this genre implements rhetorical devices to express the dominant messages. Like a choir, these texts sing in unison on these narrative features, developing an overwhelming melody line; after exploring this unison, we will turn to divergent elements – harmonies and counterpoints that add depth to this genre.

Instances of Cross-Dressing

Externally Motivated Cross-Dressing. In these series, the primary cross-dressing is always exteriorly motivated. Each character receives the impetus to cross-dress from outside herself/himself: Mizuki disguises herself as a boy because it is the only way to watch Sano, her athletic idol, perform the high-jump; Makoto understands his cross-dressing as the ultimate acting challenge – he must prove his quality as an actor to his father by being convincingly in character as a girl for the last two years of high school; and Haruhi, indebted to the Host Club after breaking a valuable vase, is ordered to “pay with her carcass” (Hatori vol. 1) and forced to cross-dress, enslaved to the Host Club. This rhetorical device – exteriorly motivated cross-dressing – allows the authors to redefine gender roles, by constructing girls who can perform masculinity and boys who can perform femininity, without actually challenging traditional gender identities. The male and female genders remain unchallenged – the protagonists do not actually want to be the other gender, nor are they questioning their own gender identity or sexuality. Instead, these characters merely cross-dress; which allows the authors to explore gender roles and create new gendered possibilities without criticizing the established gender norms. This is an important rhetorical device implemented throughout the entirety of these series, as the cross-dressing protagonists successfully pass and experience life as the other gender.

This is a moment of freedom as individuals achieve gender equality, successfully experiencing life as the opposite gender. This act undermines the binary of male/female, suggesting that females can be masculine and males can be feminine – reinforcing that

these are socially constructed categories, not physiological states. However, the authors very gently approach this topic – posing the situation as exteriorly motivated so they can explore possibilities without directly challenging gender categories.

Secondary Cross-Dressers. In addition to the central cross-dressing – the transgendered persona without whom the series would have no focus – other characters, the romantic interests and additional side characters, regularly cross-dress. Again, this is typically motivated by exterior impetuses: Sano and other classmates in *Hana-Kimi's* all boys boarding school cross-dress as part of a dinner performance; Ito, *W Juliet's* female protagonist, often passes for a boy and she and her theater troop regularly cross-dress for performances; and the Host Club in *Ouran* cross-dress so extravagantly but with no intention of passing that they function more as drag-queens.

This rhetorical device – having additional characters regularly cross-dress – functions in two distinct ways: first, it normalizes the protagonists' transgenderism – she or he is no longer unusual for cross-dressing, rather, everyone occasionally cross-dresses when the situation calls for it. Secondly, it provides both humor and plot; the characters are simply funny as they embrace their transgendered personas and the protagonists risk being discovered adding plot suspense. When everyone at school is cross-dressing for a play, our already cross-dressed protagonists are forced to “cross-dress” – to act their actual gender and they risk being revealed. However, they also use these opportunities to experience obviously heterosexual interaction with their romantic interest: Mizuki dances with Sano when forced to “cross-dress” at a school ball (Figure 7); Makoto and

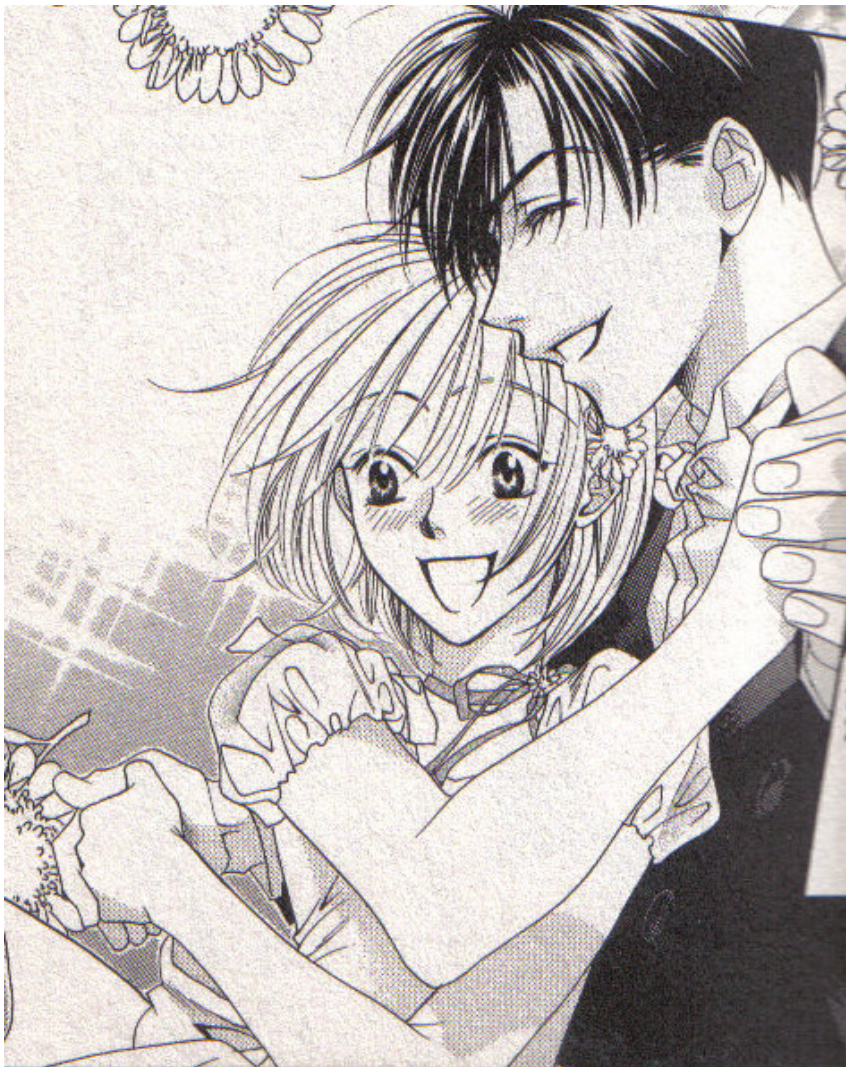


Figure 7: Cross-Cross-Dressing
Mizuki and Sano dance together (Nakajo 12:31, 2006).

Ito enjoy their theater productions more when romantically paired as their actual genders; and Tamaki fantasizes over Haruhi “cross-dressed” as a girl.

Straight Romance: Love, Rivals, and Rape

Knowing Love. Gender Benders recurrently feature romantic interests (the hero or heroine) who knows the cross-dressers’ “true” sex. In all three of these series, the romantic interest discovers the true sex of the cross-dresser by either feeling or seeing their physical bodies: Sano discovers Mizuki’s femininity (unbeknownst to her) after she faints as he carries her to the doctor (Nakajo 1:35); Makoto and Ito discover each other’s sexes and Tamaki discovers Haruhi’s femininity when they walk in on each other while changing (Figure 8) (*Ouran* epi 1; Emura 1:9, 17). This firmly, and physically, establishes the heterosexuality of the romantic relationships. This rhetorical device removes any gendered ambiguity between the primary characters, undermining the texts’ ability to manipulate gender as a category – limiting their gender construction by underscoring the traditional genders through physical demarcations.

Subconscious Gen-dar. Additionally, side characters respond to the cross-dressers as if unconsciously aware of their true sex, as if their subconscious minds had a *gender-radar* which reported cross-dressers’ actual gender. All three series privilege at least one prominent character who experiences a deep heterosexual attraction to these cross-dressed characters. However, since they fail to “see through” the disguise as the romantic partners do, they believe they are experiencing a homosexual attraction while they respond to the inherent “femininity” or “masculinity” of the cross-dresser.

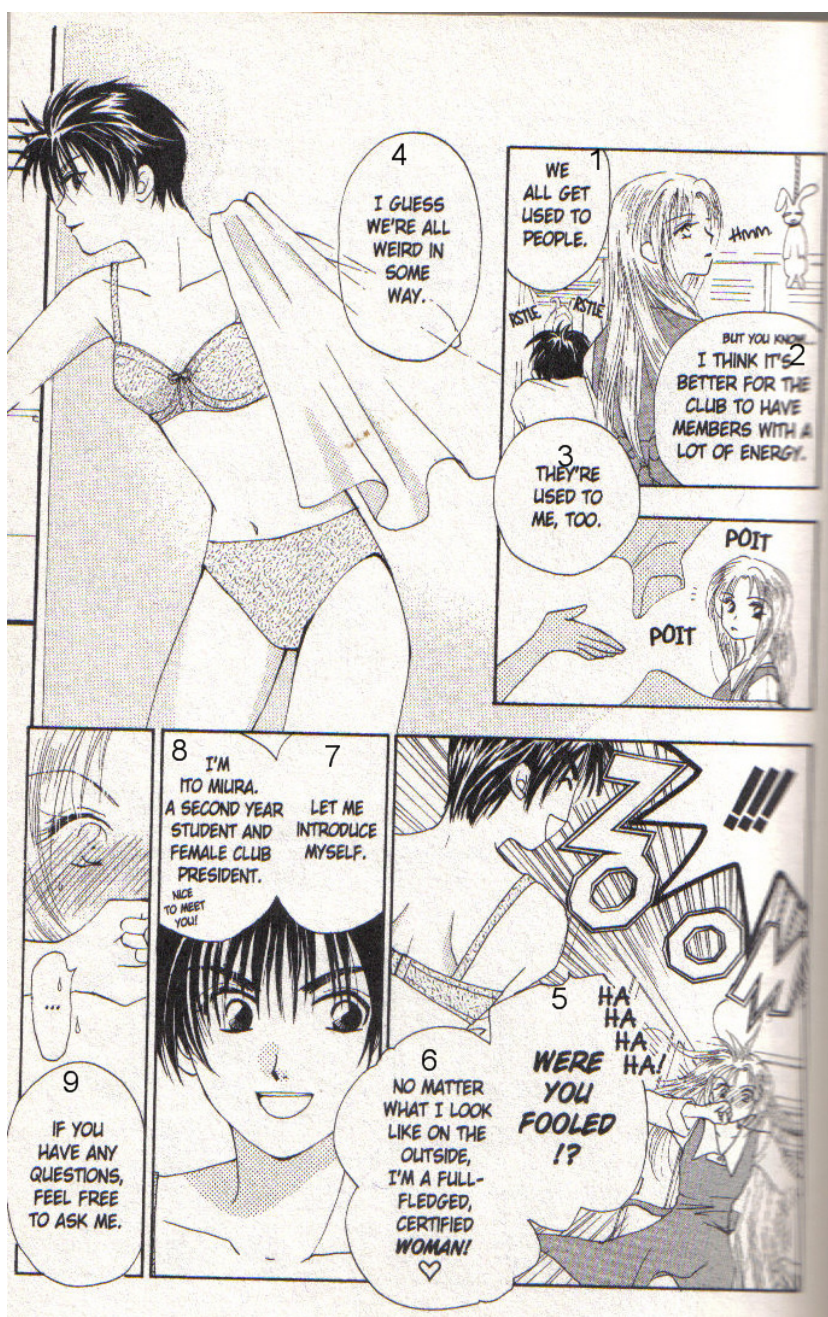


Figure 8: Gender Revealed

Cross-dressed Makoto discovers Ito's femininity by walking in on her while she changes clothes (Emura 1:9, 2004).

This is most prominent in *Hana-Kimi*, where Nakatsu, a main character, never questions Mizuki's supposed masculinity, but finds himself innately attracted to her, and has a significant, heart-racing crush on her as early as the first book (Nakajo 1:52). This theme is echoed in *W Juliet* and *Ouran* where more peripheral, heterosexual characters act on a bodily instinct – their hearts and bodies know the actual gender even when they consciously accept only the cross-dressed gender (Emura 77; Hatori vol. 8). This rhetorical device reaffirms a sense of an *essential gender*: characters respond to the essential physicality of the cross-dressers despite their successful enactment of the alternate gender.

Unlikely Love-Triangles. Like the broader genre of shōjo manga which repetitively employs love-triangles in order to empower the heroine and her ability to choose her romantic partner from at least two equally good men, this subgenre of Gender Benders employs the same love-triangles with similar effects. Despite cross-dressing, the female protagonists always have a choice to make in their romantic partners: Mizuki must choose between Sano and Nakatsu; Ito chooses Makoto only to have a myriad of rivals then challenge their relationship; and Haruhi has the entire Host Club as well as previous friends and new crushes to choose from. These women never lack for choice. This rhetorical device is, first, a celebration of female agency – the women choose their partners; secondly, a glorification of True Love – once established, the couples never waver in their passion, commitment, or tenderness; and thirdly, a reinforcement of traditional gender norms – the cross-dressed characters always represent their true gender in romantic pairings.

Rape and Gender. Closely related to this issue of heterosexual romance is the recurring plot motif of heterosexual rape threats. In each of these series, the female protagonists are sexually assaulted by male characters and these rape attempts are interrupted by the romantic interest who rescues the heroine (Nakajo 3:154-159; Emura 3:39-46; Hatori vol. 3). The rape threat functions as a rhetorical device that reestablishes the essential gender and its corresponding traditional norms: although the women act like men and compete on the same scholastic and athletic grounds with men, their feminine bodies are inscribed with sexual frailty – a weakness which can only be matched by masculine strength as their rescuer is physically privileged in these artistic depictions as large, strong, and aggressively protective (Figures 9, 10). The men are never as manly, as masculine, as when they rescue the comparatively frail heroines – even Makoto who usually cross-dresses omits his disguise when acting as Ito's rescuer (Nakajo 3:159, 186-88; Emura 3:43-45; Hatori vol. 3). The rape threats reinscribe traditional gender roles and norms upon these characters who are actively engaged in transgressing gender norms.

Non-Romantic Relationships in Gender Benders

Family Relations. In each of these series, the cross-dresser and/or his or her romantic interest lives apart from their family, and at least one of their mothers has died. In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki leaves her parents in America and lives at the boarding school in Japan – completely isolated from their support and advice. Her romantic interest, Sano, also lives at the boarding school; his biological mother has died, and he refuses to speak with his father, maintaining only a tenuous relationship with his step-mother. In *W*

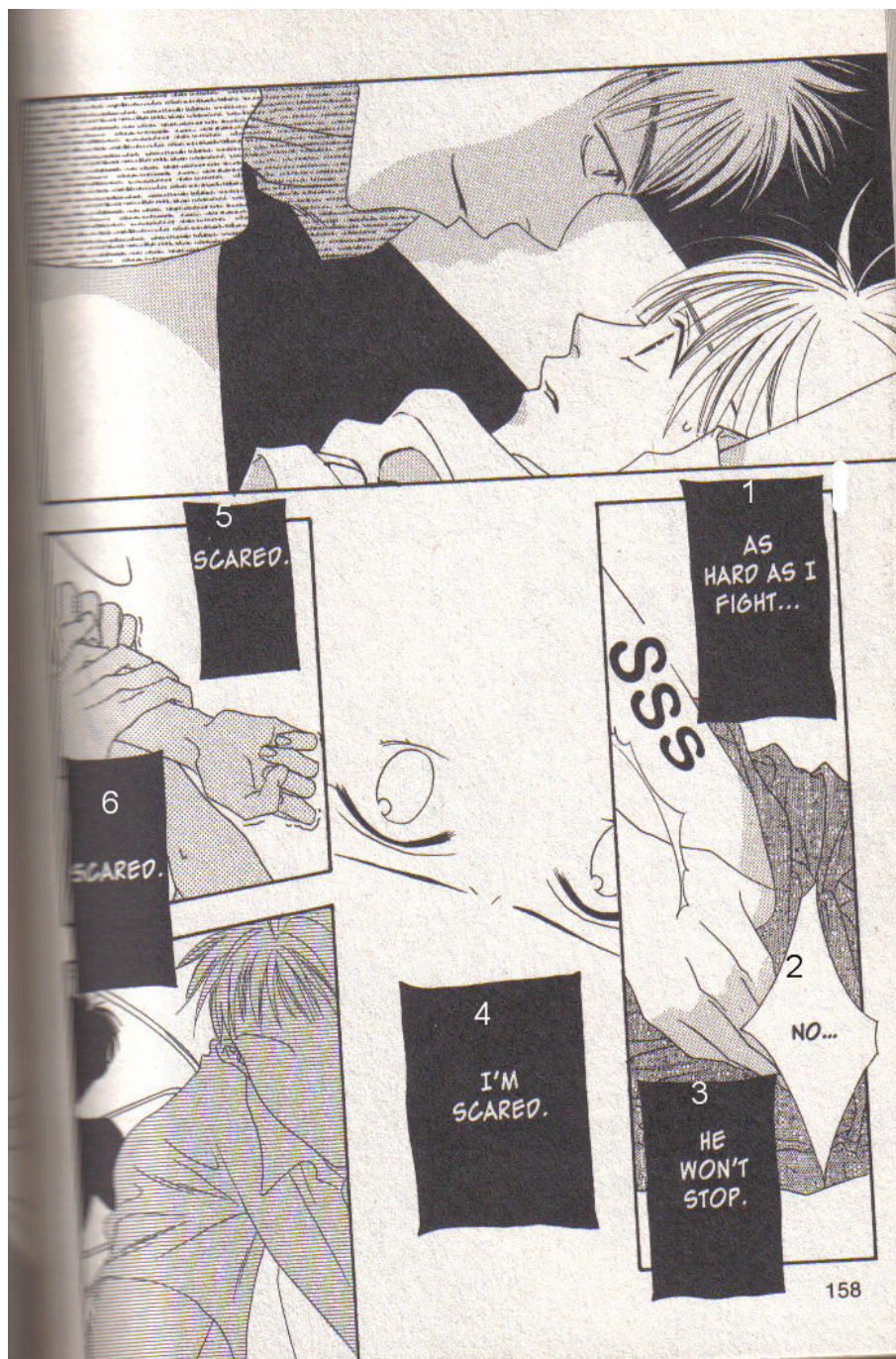


Figure 9: Rape Threat

Mizuki (while cross-dressed) is recognized and sexually assaulted (Nakojo 3:158, 2004)



Figure 10: Masculine Rescue

An immensely masculine Tamaki rescues Haruhi after her rape threat and near drowning (Hatori vol. 3, 2005).

Juliet, both Ito's and Makoto's mothers have died, Makoto left his father's house to live alone in the city while masquerading as a girl, and he rarely speaks with his father except to fight. Meanwhile Ito's father is significantly unusual, and hardly maintains a parental role in her life. In *Ouran*, Haruhi's mother has died, and her father, being bisexual, now lives as a Queen, and rarely – if ever – acts in a parental role. Meanwhile, Tamaki (her ultimate romantic pairing and president of the Host Club) lives alone in a mansion, separated from his Parisian mother at a young age (she has now died), and estranged from his father by an exceedingly cruel grandmother.

While the male and female characters appear to have equally dysfunctional families, in actuality, the boys experience significantly more trauma and relational distress because of their families. This familial alienation functions rhetorically to offer the girls complete autonomy and a healthy sense of self-determinism and sufficiency, and to posit the boys as completely controlled by their emotionally absent families who dictate unwanted engagements and careers. The boys suffer under a sense of “unwantedness” that never affects the girls, and what remains of their families often interferes with their lives in senselessly cruel ways. This rhetorically functions to allow the girls a more complete agency: they have complete physical and emotional control over themselves, and they invariably intervene in the boys' lives to rescue them from their cruel families and often, to restore more harmonious relationships between the boys and their families. This positions the heroines as autonomous agents with the power to rescue men from domestic dysfunction, unwanted engagements, and unwelcome careers.

Cross-Dressing and Group Relations. Moreover, these series situate the protagonists within a realm of close friendships and group activities. In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki and Sano have close friendships with the boys who live in their dorm. In *W Juliet*, Ito and Makoto have close friendships with their siblings and with the drama club, and in *Ouran*, Haruhi and Tamaki have close friendships with the other boys in the Host Club. These series realistically depict how, within groups, individuals develop deeper relationships with some than with others, how arguments and disagreements can disrupt groups, and how groups adapt to and accommodate individuals' needs and idiosyncrasies. These groups serve as a narrative backdrop against which the featured romance occurs. Group members are always questioning and gossiping about perceived romantic involvements, and group members develop and grow together as the series progress. This rhetorical device multi-facets the heroine and hero portraying them as more complex characters than their romantic portrayal could provide and offers an element of realism by display positive aspects (companionship, diversity, and general fun) and negative aspects (rivalry, jealousy, egotism, and possessiveness) of group relationships.

Significant Differences within Gender Benders

Within the genre of Gender Benders, we have seen significant similarities as these series toy with issues of gender construction, presenting a cross-dressed protagonist and yet maintaining her/his essential gender. The same narrative features recur throughout these texts, establishing strong rhetorical messages of female empowerment and yet re-inscribing traditional femininity, even on their transgendered

bodies. However, these texts also present significant differences in how they approach cross-dressing, romantic relationships, and homosexuality. These differences work together, creating complicated counter-melodies against overwhelming similarities as they negotiate gender roles and identity.

Different Approaches to Cross-Dressing

Each of these series has a significantly different approach to cross-dressing, even as they all present successful cross-dressers who attend Japanese high schools while separated from their families. In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki successfully cross-dresses, fooling nearly her entire high school, but is revealed to Sano, the school doctor, and the readers, as a rather acute failure at cross-dressing. Sano constantly covers for her, and attempts (surreptitiously – since he refuses to let her know that he knows she is a girl) to explain how she could act more masculine (Figure 11). Mizuki is so feminine, so essentially girly, that she never fools the reader into mistaking her for a boy. In contrast, in *W Juliet*, readers first encounter both Ito and Makoto as successfully cross-dressed. Readers learn their true genders only when they change clothes – through physical manifestation. Ito and Makoto are successful cross-dressers, capable of hiding their genders from each other, the school in general, and the readers. This makes them more efficient at toying with gender boundaries and gender construction. Finally, in *Ouran*, Haruhi personally feels androgynous, or asexual, and she first appears masculine – the Host Club and readers alike discover her female gender as a surprise. These different



Figure 11: Man Lessons

Mizuki comforts Sano who worries that he cannot perform the high-jump anymore. She begins to cry and he says, “Stop it! Guy’s don’t cry about stuff like this!” (Nakojo 2:63, 2004).

approaches to cross-dressing set up different narrative cycles within the texts which offer glimpses at how these authors attempted to navigate issues of gender norms while maintaining traditional gender identities.

In *Hana-Kimi*, cross-dressing is primarily approached as a costume – something to put on and take off which is unrelated to the actual self. On the front covers of these books, the artists create special cover art depictions which feature main characters from the series. In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki is featured eight times on the covers – often with Sano and/or other characters – in seven of the eight depictions she appears excruciatingly feminine. For example, she appears in a nurse’s costume in volume 22, and clutches a giant chocolate heart while Sano holds her in volume 21. Mizuki never wants to act like a boy, she is relatively bad at cross-dressing, and her femininity is constantly emphasized to the reader. *Hana-Kimi* rhetorically situates cross-dressing as something humorous, useful, and completely unrelated to one’s gender and personality.

In *W Juliet*, cross-dressing is a means to an end – and the end is always in sight. Throughout the entirety of *W Juliet*, Ito and Makoto are waiting for the two years of high school to end so Makoto can live as a boy again – and marry Ito. This emphasis on the end is unique to *W Juliet*: in *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki rarely considers graduating from high school or leaving Sano, and in *Ouran*, the seasons and years pass without anyone graduating or discussing the end of high school and cross-dressing. *W Juliet*’s author, Emura, admits to unabashed *fan-service* (beautiful and often sexy depictions of characters): she prominently features Makoto without his female disguise despite its narrative impossibility to appeal to her female readership (Emura 3:59). Only in *W*

Juliet – where the boy primarily cross-dresses – does the end feature so prominently. *W Juliet* rhetorically situates cross-dressing as a means to an end, a constraining, unwanted, temporary imposition – this is natural in our patriarchal society since feminine roles are disempowering for men.

In *Ouran*, Haruhi is naturally androgynous – she rarely considers gender or romance (Figure 12). The Host Club forces her to cross-dress in public, but spends the entirety of their private time (of which there is quite a lot for a dating service) attempting to feminize her. Both the Host Club and her bisexual father constantly try to put her in dresses, bikinis, and long-haired wigs – feminine clothing she constantly and emphatically resists. Finding her deviantly masculine, the Host Club relentlessly attempts to feminize her and reinscribe femininity upon her asexual personality. For example, in the third volume, they find her bravery disconcerting and begin one of their many “games,” otherwise entitled “hot blooded battle of men” this one to “find Haruhi’s weakness” (Hatori vol. 3). They subject her to numerous tests (bugs, snakes, caves, etc) relentlessly searching for her weakness until Tamaki discovers her fear of thunder storms. *Ouran* rhetorically situates cross-dressing as a natural extension (but also an externally enforced imperative) of Haruhi’s androgynous personality – a personality which meets constant challenge as the boys refuse to accept her without trying to feminizing her.

Through these different approaches to cross-dressing, these narratives vary in the way they create and present gender. In *Hana-Kimi*, one’s original sex is the determining factor in gender identity – Mizuki is a girl and nothing, not even her successful two-year

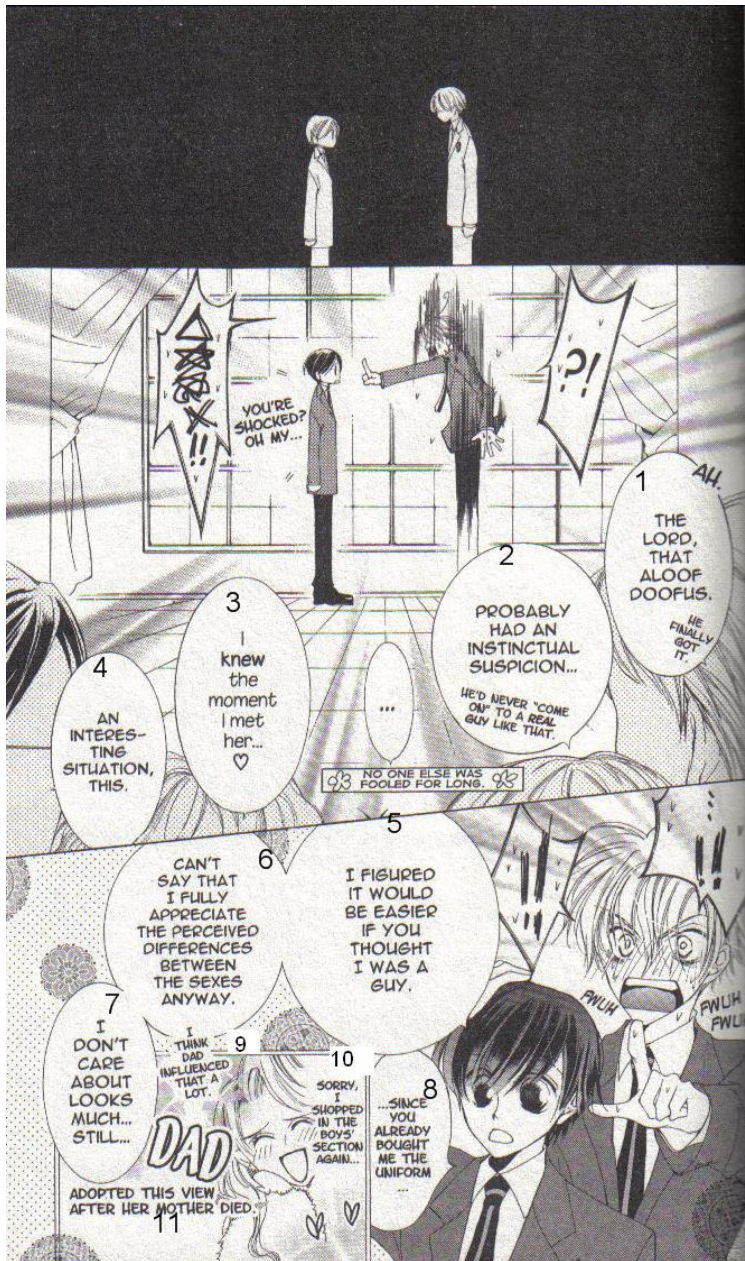


Figure 12: Androgynous Heroines

Haruhi muses about her asexuality while Tamaki freaks out after realizing that Haruhi is female (Hatori vol 1, 2005).

cross-dressing experience can suggest that gender is more complex than biology. In *W Juliet*, the situation is more involved since Ito's natural state is sufficiently boy-ish to be mistaken for a boy, and Makoto's cross-dressing is so flawless he sets the standards for femininity at the school. However, Makoto's obvious dislike for cross-dressing and the narrative emphasis on the end of his transgendered persona undermines the suggestion that gender roles are social constructions that either sex can fill. And in *Ouran*, we have both the most obvious attempt at the negation of gender roles and an internal backlash that reasserts them: Haruhi is naturally androgynous and comments self-referentially, "[I] can't say that I fully appreciated the perceived differences between the sexes anyway" (Hatori vol. 1). As Haruhi asserts herself as an individual completely unconcerned with socially constructed gender roles, her supporting characters match her with a complete obsession with gender roles and with fitting Haruhi into *proper* femininity.

Differences in Romance: Heterosexuality & Homosexuality

These narratives also emphasize different aspects of romantic relationships: in *Hana-Kimi* the entire 23 volumes focus on attraction, waiting for Mizuki and Sano to confess their love for each other and begin a romantic relationship; in *W Juliet*, Ito and Makoto confess their love within the first volume, and the emphasis is on their committed relationship; and in *Ouran*, at least three of the hosts have significant romantic attachments to her, and she is only ambiguously paired with Tamaki in the last episode. These different approaches to romantic relationships create different messages and themes concerning gender roles and limitations. Ultimately, these three texts all

depict heterosexual relationships with a fairly even distribution of power and agency between the heroines and heroes, but by offering us different stages of romance these texts construct gender categories in different ways. In *Hana-Kimi*, gender is exciting and attractive – Mizuki and Sano are drawn to each other and depicted as inherently sexy (Figure 13). In *W Juliet*, gender is a celebration of selfhood: Ito and Makoto enjoy their biological genders as they relate with each other (Figure 14), and Ito states, “the only one who can really make me feel like a woman is Makoto!” (Emura 1:170). And in *Ouran*, gender is an essential part of how the boys understand humanity and relationships and a peripheral element of Haruhi’s world.

Finally, these texts also have significantly different approaches to the topic of homosexuality. Issues of sexual orientation, homosexuality, and bisexuality are never far from texts which focus on cross-dressing characters and transgendered personas. *Hana-Kimi* has the most thorough and serious exploration of this topic – although homosexuality often receives humorous treatment even in this series. *Hana-Kimi* seriously presents an established and loving homosexual couple (two of the students are committed to each other), a bisexual artist, a homosexual boy in love with a straight man, Nakatsu who believes he’s gay because he loves Mizuki, and Dr. Umeda – the gay doctor who serves as a mentor to Mizuki. These characters are treated with respect and their same-sex attraction and love is featured in serious light. *W Juliet* rarely touches on the topic since Makoto spends so much time as a man and quickly rebuffs any boys who try to date him while he is cross-dressed as a woman. In *Ouran*, homosexuality and bisexuality are rarely dealt with except with a strongly emphasized humorous element.



Figure 13: Sexy Heroes

Sano is a very sexy character in *Hana-Kimi* (Nakajo 10:5, 2006).

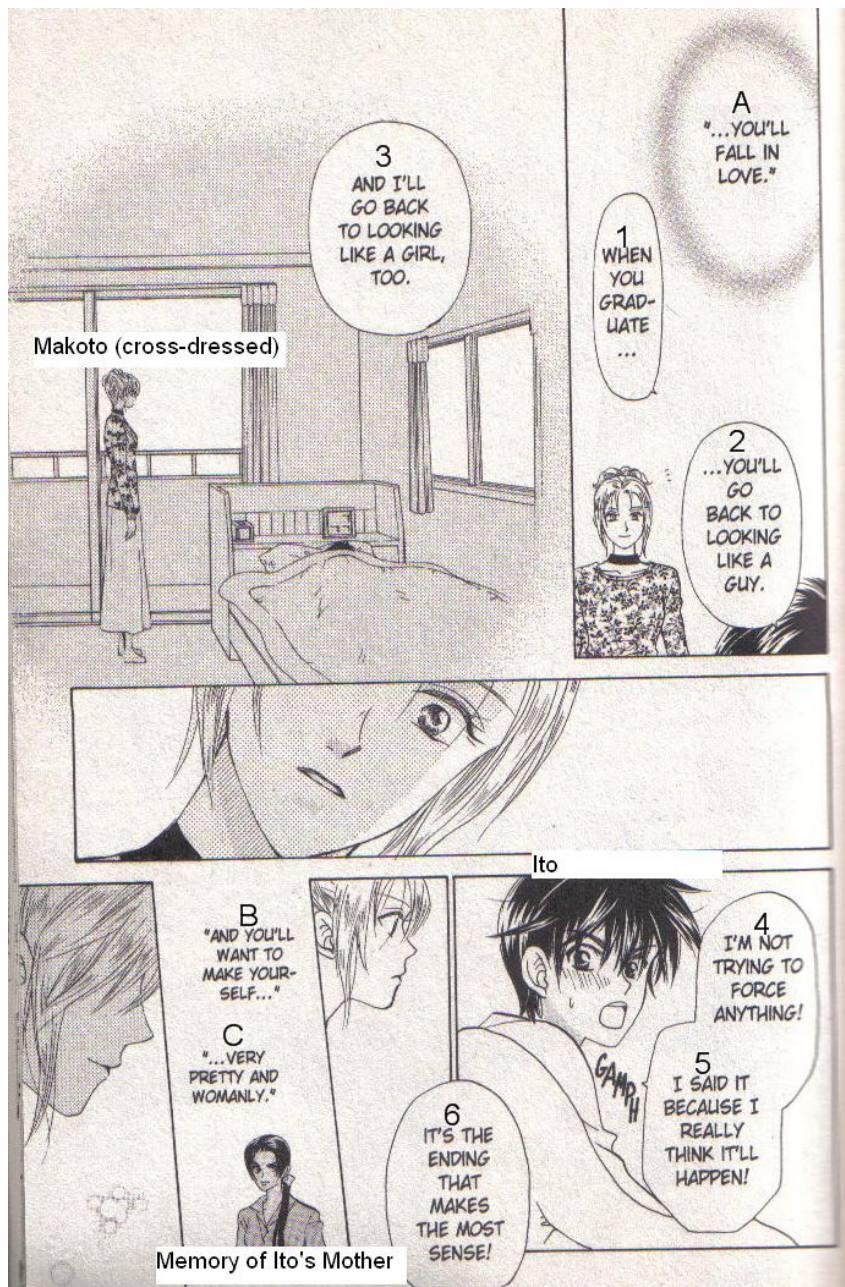


Figure 14: True Gender

Remembering her mother's words (dialogue A-C), Ito determines to enjoy her femininity with Makoto (Emura 5:127, 2005).

Two members of the Host Club, twins, Hikaru and Kaoru, maintain a phony homosexual relationship with each other to titillate their female clients.¹⁷ Haruhi's father, originally a bisexual man who stopped seeing women after his wife died, is now a professional Queen – even with his serious back-story, Haruhi's father is unequivocally presented in a humorous light. Each of these non-heterosexual characters and/or pretences are featured as deviant, humorous behavior. Through these different portrayals of homosexuality, these texts construct gender in slightly dissimilar manners. *Hana-Kimi* offers the most serious representation of homosexuality because gender roles are divorced from sexuality: same-sex attraction does not make either boy less male. *W Juliet's* avoidance of homosexuality allows the text to frame gender as a simple male-female binary – although this categorical binary allows males to be feminine and females to be masculine. Finally, *Ouran's* abundance of homosexual portrayals familiarizes same-sex romance even as the insistent humor depicts homosexuality as deviant. This rhetorically functions to reestablish gender roles: men and women create romantic couples, whereas same-sex couples create humor.

Conclusion and Discussion

Ultimately, Gender Benders portray equal relationships – both the female and male characters have agency, the power to choose and to act, and they enact mutually supportive relationships. Moreover, this genre toys with gender roles since the cross-dressers successfully maintain a transgendered persona; boys can enact femininity and

¹⁷ This is an inside joke played on shōjo's subgenres: *Yaoi* and *Boy Love* – genres which are sold exclusively to female readers but feature male-male romances. The twins enact a homosexual relationship in order to cater to their female classmates who read *Yaoi* and *Boy Love*.

girls can enact masculinity – subverting traditional gender norms. While gender norms are transcended, gender identity is strongly reinforced: Gender Bender manga emphasizes one's *essential gender* – based on biology – girls are girls and boys are boys and although the roles are occasionally reversed and norms are a site of contestation and negotiation, gender itself is rarely challenged. Despite cross-dressing, the characters' essential gender remains unaltered, and their original femininity or masculinity ultimately reestablishes itself.

Through this analysis, we can see that Gender Bender manga such as *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club*, utilize rhetorical devices to weave their messages throughout the narrative. A number of these rhetorical devices subvert traditional gender roles, challenging socially constructed definitions of femininity and masculinity: 1) these texts utilize exteriorly motivated cross-dressing to redefine gender roles – girls perform masculinity and boys perform femininity; 2) side characters regularly cross-dress to normalize transgenderedism – allowing more room for gender transgression; 3) through the rhetorical device of the love-triangle, these texts celebrate female agency – the power and ability to choose romantic partners; and 4) by utilizing group friendships and familial alienation, these texts present self-actualized heroines who have multi-faceted personalities and identities.

However, these texts also have built-in constraints – rhetorical devices which function to limit the texts' ability to blur gender identity: 1) by removing any gendered ambiguity between the primary characters (the romantic interest knows the cross-dresser's true sex) the text limits its own ability to manipulate gender construction by

underscoring the traditional genders through physicality; 2) by allowing side characters to subconsciously sense the cross-dresser's actual sex, the texts reaffirm a sense of *essential gender* – despite successfully enacting the opposite's gender roles, cross-dressers are understood in terms of their physicality; and 3) rape threats function to not only reiterate the cross-dresser's essential gender but also establish females as sexually frail – susceptible to sexual assaults despite being men's athletic equals.

Gender Bender manga grows out of a complex Japanese history which provides a traditional space for cross-dressing and gender negotiation within the entertainment sphere while, in modern times, restricting homosexuality. These impulses run strong in Gender Bender manga as these texts continue to manipulate gender norms yet primarily approach homosexuality as a deviant sexuality. These texts are similar enough to Western genres of gender bending, that American audiences can justify these narratives. Yet these texts begin to subvert the five standard motifs of Western gender bending. In Western narratives women almost exclusively cross-dress in order to achieve masculine power; while this does occur in Gender Bender manga, occasionally women, such as Ito from *W Juliet* and Haruhi from *Ouran*, are already blurring gender norms and are mistaken for men. Secondly, in Western narratives the audience is usually in on the cross-dressing act from the beginning; this occurs in some Gender Bender manga (*Hana-Kimi*), but fairly regularly the audience is tricked by the cross-dresser at the beginning of the narrative (*W Juliet*, *Ouran*). Gender Bender manga conforms with Western narratives on the third and fourth elements: women always return to their natural “femininity” at the end of the narrative, and heterosexual romances are predominantly

featured. The final element of Western narratives, that women experience some form of punishment for having passed as a man is generally overlooked in Gender Bender manga – they may experience some social awkwardness but since their romantic interest already knew their sex, cross-dressers can slide back into their original gender without much punishment. These differences from Western literature opens a space within the American girlhood culture to manipulate gender roles as girls read about heroines who successfully enact masculine norms without being reprimanded.

Given the potential for this genre as it develops within American popular culture, this genre requires future critical analysis to ascertain exactly how stories with a female cross-dresser differ from those with a male cross-dresser, how these instances of gender bending relate to other manga genres in which side characters occasionally cross-dress or manipulate gender in other ways, and an audience analysis should be conducted to understand how American girls understand and use these texts. Gender Bender manga offers an important site for gender construction and negotiation and both their positive and negative aspects need to be better understood.

Ultimately, these texts celebrate feminine agency and begin to make a space within popular culture in which to negotiate gender roles. Their rhetorical constraints keep these texts from more broadly negotiating issues of gender identity and construction, but these texts do successfully depict transversed gender roles.

CHAPTER VI

SHŌJO AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

Interested in learning how shōjo audiences perceive and interact with the themes developed in shōjo and the representation of the shōjo heroine, I conducted both an original audience survey analysis and an audience-generated message board analysis. This information provides a greater understanding of how these active shōjo fans understand these texts and why they enjoy shōjo.

Shōjo Survey Results

In order to better understand how shōjo is received by American audiences, I conducted a survey distributed to anime/manga fan clubs: I contacted *Cephoid Variable* and *Aggime*, two anime/manga clubs active at Texas A&M University and *A-kon Dallas* an over 12,000 member anime/manga convention group, inviting group members via email to participate in my anonymous online survey and to forward the survey invitation to their anime/manga friends. This survey asked a series of questions regarding individuals' involvement in and perceptions of shōjo. I received 524 responses, which rendered 385 useable responses.¹⁸ Although shōjo is exclusively marketed to a female audience, males do read/watch shōjo and 93 respondents were male, 275 were female, and 17 refrained from indicating their sex.

I utilized a 5 point Likert scale throughout the survey, in which 1 represents “Strongly Agree” and 5 represents “Strongly Disagree.” My survey was organized in

¹⁸ Participants had to answer the first 20 questions – moving beyond demographic information and into their evaluation of shōjo narratives and shōjo heroines – to be considered useable responses.

five sections, each of which had a series of questions: 1) general demographic information including participant's breadth of exposure and ownership behavior; 2) participant's enjoyment of shōjo's characteristics and perceptions of the typical and ideal heroine; 3) participants' level of wishful identification with their favorite heroine; 4) participants' level of parasocial relationship with their favorite heroine; and 5) participants' comparison of shōjo to general girlhood entertainment and fantasy girlhood entertainment.

Indices Created

Respondents provided basic demographic information, such as gender, minutes per day spent reading/watch shōjo, and approximate number of years they have been reading/watching shōjo. When respondents indicated a range of time (30-90min, or 1-4hr) for their approximate time spent reading/watching shojo on an average day, I simplified to their mean: if they entered 30-90minutes, I entered 60 minutes in the data. Also, some respondents generalized, responding "approximately 6 years" for how long they have been involved in shōjo or "approximately 2 hours" for minutes per day spent reading/watching shōjo. When respondents generalized in this manner, I simplified to the number they indicated, so "approximately 6 years" became "6 years" and "approximately 2 hours" became "2 hours."

Shōjo Characteristics. To organize my data, I conducted principle components extraction with varimax rotation to organize my data by relevant factors. To assess what shōjo characteristics appealed to audience members, I dropped the ambiguous variables of *artistry*, *beautiful girls*, and *beautiful boys*, after which the other variables *Heroine's*

Personality, Plots, Humor, Love Triangles, Japanese Elements, and Recurring Themes operated as a single variable with a Cronbach alpha of .65.

Heroine Characteristics. I conducted a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation to assess how the 14 heroine characteristics stringing responses from the participant's perception of the typical and ideal heroine clustered together. The first factor that emerged was labeled *Heroine's Prosociality* which clustered the variables *Encouraging, Friendly, Kind, Sacrificial, Loyal, and Values Life* – the reliability for this factor was Cronbach alpha of .67. The second factor was labeled *Heroine's Activeness* and clustered the variables *Bold, Determined, Persevering, and Intelligent* – the reliability for this factor was Cronbach alpha of .64. I dropped the variables *humorous, domestic, and optimistic* because they loaded on both factors. I left the responses indicating participants' perceptions of the typical heroine and their ideal heroine's level of *Silliness/Ditzyness* as unique variables because they function as key variables in this analysis.

Wishful Identification. Variables regarding the participant's level of wishful identification with their favorite shōjo heroine fell into two factors after I conducted a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. I labeled the first factor *Wishful Identification* since it clustered variables in which participants stated that they wished they were more like their favorite heroine at a Cronbach's alpha of .87. The second factor is labeled *Direct Imitation* since it clustered variables in which participants indicated their level of imitating their favorite heroine at Cronbach's alpha of .94.

Parasocial Relationships. Variables regarding the participants' level of parasocial relationships with their favorite shōjo heroine fell into two factors after I conducted a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation. I labeled the first factor *Parasocial Maintenance* since it clustered variables regarding how participants maintained their parasocial relationship with their favorite heroine at Cronbach's alpha of .71. The second factor is labeled *Parasocial Emotions* since it clustered variables in which participants indicated their level of emotional involvement with their favorite heroine at Cronbach's alpha of .80.

Comparison with other Girlhood Entertainment. Finally, all of the variables comparing shōjo to general girlhood entertainment loaded as a single factor at Cronbach's alpha of .92 – I labeled this factor *Prefers Shojo over Girlhood Entertainment*. Similarly the variables comparing shōjo to fantasy girlhood entertainment loaded as single factor at Cronbach's alpha of .95 and I labeled this factor *Prefers Shojo over Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment*. Table 3 presents the data relating these factors.

Survey Results

To answer my interrelated research questions: How do audience members perceive shojo heroines? Do these heroines stimulate parasocial relationships and/or wishful identification? How do audience members understand shōjo in relation to American girlhood entertainment? Given how audience members relate to shōjo heroines, how are the themes developed through these heroines received? the following variables (presented in Table 4, below) became significant.

Table 3: New Variables

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Reliability	Possible Min/Max
Shojo Ownership	2.52	.92	.70	1/5
Breadth of Shōjo Exposure	7.56	4.76	.85	0/21
Enjoyment of Shōjo-Genre Heroines	2.21	.75	.70	1/5
Enjoyment of Gender Bender Heroines	1.80	.75	.57	1/5
Enjoyment of All Analyzed Heroines	2.05	6.50	.74	1/5
Enjoyment of Shōjo Narratives	1.89	.44	.65	1/5
String Perceptions of Heroine's Prosociality	1.89	.59	.67	1/5
String Perceptions of Heroine's Activeness	1.72	.59	.63	1/5
Wishful Identification	2.53	.87	.87	1/5
Direct Imitation	3.38	1.14	.94	1/5
Parasocial Maintenance	1.77	.65	.71	1/5
Parasocial Emotional	2.10	.69	.80	1/5
Prefers Shojo over Girlhood Entertainment	1.98	.65	.92	1/5
Prefers Shojo over Fantasy Entertainment	2.01	.77	.95	1/5

Table 4: Significant Variables

	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Possible Min/Max
Minutes per Day	106.03	96.66	1/760
Heavy/Light Involvement	2.62	1.18	1/5
Wishful Identification	2.53	.87	1/5
Direct Imitation	3.38	1.14	1/5
Parasocial Maintenance	1.77	.65	1/5
Parasocial Emotions	2.10	.69	1/5
Prefers Shojo over Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment	1.98	.65	1/5
Prefers Shojo over Girlhood Entertainment	2.20	.77	1/5
Enjoyment of Shojo Narratives	1.89	.44	1/5
String Perceptions of Heroine's Prosociality	1.89	.59	1/5
String Perceptions of Heroine's Activeness	1.72	.59	1/5
Ideal Heroine is Silly/Ditzy	3.54	1.31	1/5
Typical Heroine is Silly/Ditzy	2.25	1.07	1/5

Perceptions of Shōjo Heroines

Research Question #1 asked: How do audience members perceive shojo heroines? An examination of the descriptive statistics indicates the mean score for audiences' perceptions of shōjo heroines as pro-social was 1.89 ($SD = .59$), which can be interpreted as respondents strongly agreeing that both the typical and their ideal shōjo heroine are pro-social.

Similarly, the mean score for respondents' perceptions of shōjo heroines as active characters was 1.72 ($SD = .59$), indicating that respondents strongly agreed that both the typical and their ideal shōjo heroine are active characters.

This data is in keeping with my rhetorical analysis and suggests that audience members are aware of how super-heroically good (pro-social) these heroines are while they demonstrate active characteristics usually reserved for male characters. This data is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that shōjo audience members maintain that the typical shōjo heroine corresponds to their imaginary ideal shōjo heroine on these pro-social and active character traits.

However, respondents reported a large difference between their perception of the typical shōjo heroine's level of silliness or ditzyness and their ideal heroine's level of silliness/ditzyness. The mean score for respondents' perceptions of silliness/ditzyness in the *typical heroine* was 2.25 ($SD = 1.07$), indicating that they *somewhat agree* that the typical shōjo heroine is silly/ditzy. This differs from their desires for an ideal shōjo heroine, whose mean silly/ditzy score was 3.54; by which respondents reported a

response midway between *Neither Agree nor Disagree* and *Somewhat Disagree* that the ideal heroine should be silly/ditzy.

Interaction between Audience and Heroine

Research Question #2: Do these heroines stimulate parasocial relationships and/or wishful identification? The data concerning how respondents relate to shōjo heroines broke down into four factors, the first two which relate to the theory of Parasocial Relationships and the second two which relate to the theory of Wishful Identification: *Parasocial Maintenance* ($M=1.77$, $SD=.65$), *Parasocial Emotions* ($M=2.10$, $SD=.69$), *Wishful Identification* ($M=2.53$, $SD=.87$), and *Direct Imitation* ($M=3.38$, $SD=1.14$). According to this data, we can see that audience members strongly agree that they engage in activities which maintain parasocial relationships (they anticipate seeing the heroine in the next episode and feel comfortable with her as with a friend), somewhat agree that they have parasocial emotional responses to the heroine (worry about the heroine, feel happy when she is happy, etc) and wishfully identify with the heroine (wish I were more like the heroine, want to do the kinds of things the heroine does, etc), and responded neutrally to direct imitation (purposely imitate the heroine's attitude, actions, gestures, etc). Thus we see that audience members relate to shōjo heroines primarily through parasocial relationships and to a lesser extent engage in wishful identification with the heroine.

Parasocial Maintenance. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the

predictors of parasocial maintenance. Regression results indicate an overall model of two predictors (Heavy/Light involvement and Minutes per Day) that significantly predict Parasocial Maintenance, and Knowledgeable Level is moderately significant ($p = .08$), $F(6, 323)=4.50, p < .001, R^2=.077, R^2_{adj}=.06$. Appendix A, Table A-1 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and parasocial maintenance, Heavy/Light involvement ($t = 2.901, p < .05$), Minutes per Day ($t = -2.239, p < .05$), and Knowledgeable Level ($t = 1.735, p = .08$) each significantly predicted parasocial maintenance (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Parasocial Emotions. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the predictors of Parasocial Emotions. Regression results indicate an overall model of two predictors (Heavy/Light involvement and moderately significant for Minutes per Day) that predicted parasocial emotions, $F(6, 323)=3.39, p < .005, R^2=.06, R^2_{adj}=.04$. Appendix A, Table A-3 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and parasocial emotions, Heavy/Light involvement ($t = 2.66, p < .05$), and Minutes per Day

($t = -1.88, p = .06$), each significantly predicted parasocial emotions (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Wishful Identification. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the predictors of wishful identification. Regression results indicate an overall model of three predictors (Gender, Current Age, and Heavy/Light involvement) that significantly predict wishful identification, $F(6, 327) = 9.61, p < .001, R^2 = .15, R^2_{adj} = .13$. Appendix A, Table A-4 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and wishful identification, gender ($t = -2.69, p < .05$), current age ($t = 3.54, p < .05$), heavy/light involvement ($t = 3.45, p < .05$) each significantly predicted wishful identification (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Direct Imitation. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the predictors of Direct Imitation. Regression results indicate an overall model of two predictors (Heavy/Light involvement and Knowledgeable Level) that significantly predict wishful identification, $F(6, 322) = 3.94, p < .005, R^2 = .07, R^2_{adj} = .05$. Appendix A, Table A-5 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and Direct Imitation, Heavy/Light involvement ($t = 2.42, p < .05$) and Knowledgeable Level ($t = 2.15, p < .05$) each significantly predicted direct imitation (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Comparison of Shōjo to American Girlhood Entertainment

Research Question #3: How do audience members understand shōjo in relation to American girlhood entertainment? Participants were asked to compare shōjo first to general American girlhood entertainment, prompted with examples such as “movies starring Lindsey Lohan or Hillary Duff and books like the *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* series” and then to compare shōjo to fantasy girlhood entertainment, prompted with examples such as the “*Twilight Series*.” The mean score for audiences’ preference of shōjo as compared to general girlhood entertainment was 1.98 ($SD = .77$), and the mean for fantasy entertainment was 2.01 ($SD = .65$). In this five point Likert scale, a score of 1 represents “strongly agree” and 5 represents “strongly disagree” with a scale item. Thus, a score of 1.98 and 2.01, respectively, indicates that audience members *somewhat agree* that shōjo is preferable to general American girlhood entertainment, and to a slightly lesser extent that shōjo is preferable to fantasy girlhood entertainment. See Figure 15.

General Girlhood Entertainment. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the predictors of Prefers Shōjo over General Girlhood Entertainment.

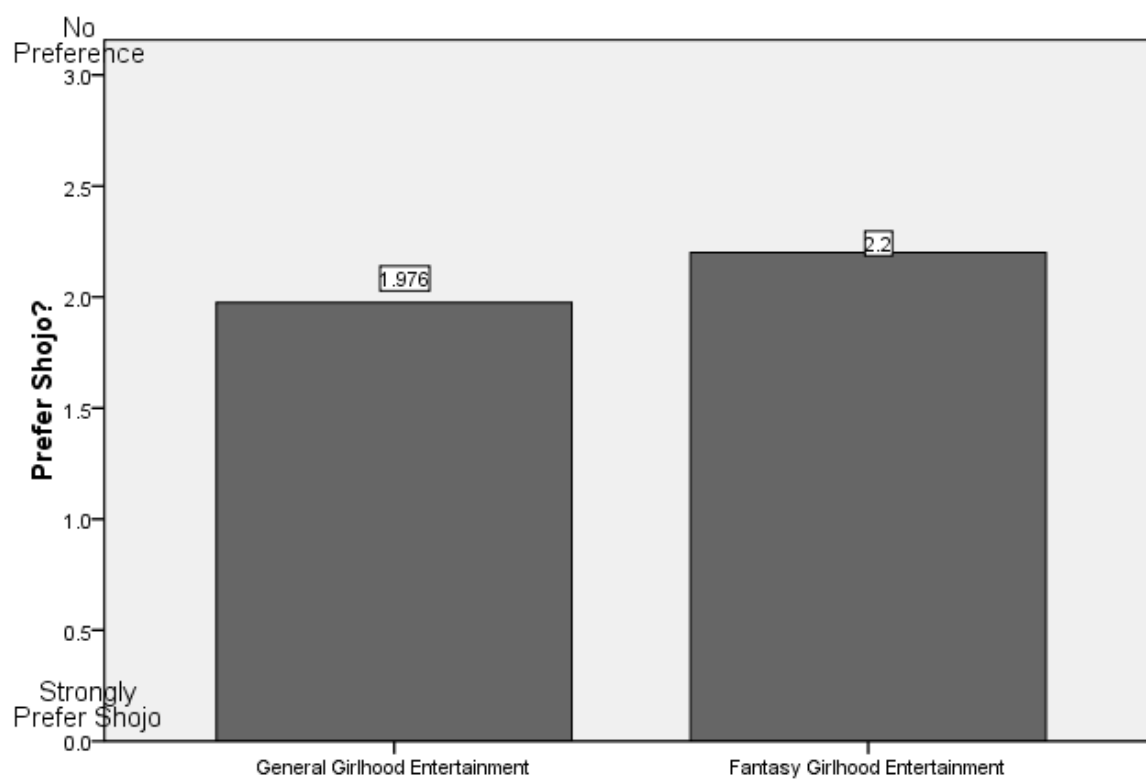


Figure 15: Preference for Shōjo

Regression results indicate an overall model of three predictors (Heavy/Light involvement, Minutes per Day, and – moderately significant – Gender) that significantly predict Prefers Shōjo over General Girlhood Entertainment, $F(6, 303) = 6.57, p < .001, R^2 = .14, R^2_{adj} = .097$. Appendix A, Table A-6 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and Prefers Shōjo over General Girlhood Entertainment, Heavy/Light involvement ($t = 4.86, p < .05$), Minutes per Day ($t = -2.12, p < .05$), and Gender was moderately significant ($t = 1.93, p = .055$) each significantly predicted prefers shōjo over general girlhood entertainment (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment. A multiple regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (Gender; Current Age; Number of Years involved in shōjo; Heavy/Light involvement; Minutes per Day; and Knowledgeable Level) were the predictors of Prefers Shōjo over Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment. Regression results indicate an overall model of three predictors (Heavy/Light involvement, Number of Years watching Shōjo, and – moderately significant – Gender) that significantly predict Prefers Shōjo over Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment, $F(6, 271) = 5.17, p < .001, R^2 = .102, R^2_{adj} = .08$. Appendix A, Table A-7 displays the unstandardized regression coefficients (B), intercept, and standardized regression coefficients (β) for each variable.

In terms of individual relationships between the independent variables and Prefers Shōjo over Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment, Heavy/Light involvement ($t = 3.32,$

$p < .05$), Number of Years watching Shojo ($t = 2.12$, $p < .05$), and Gender ($t = 2.26$, $p < .05$) each significantly predicted Prefers Shōjo to Fantasy Girlhood Entertainment (see Appendix A, Table A-2 for means and standard deviations).

Heroine Significance

This survey analysis confirmed that the texts I analyzed are significant within the shojo genre. A Univariate Anova analysis which utilized the respondent's favorite heroine as the independent variable found significant variation indicating that if the respondent's favorite heroine was one of the heroines I analyzed in my rhetorical analysis, that respondent experienced significantly more enjoyment of shōjo narratives in general $F(1, 382) = 9.96$, $p < .001$, significantly preferred shōjo narratives in comparison to general girlhood entertainment: $F(1, 341) = 5.88$, $p < .001$, and also significantly preferred shōjo in comparison to fantasy entertainment: $F(1, 304) = 1.62$, $p < .001$, as indicated in Table 5.¹⁹

Discussion of Survey Results

Bi-Gendered Heroines. Through this survey analysis we can see the shōjo audience members appreciate the merger of pro-sociality (traditionally feminine traits) ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .59$) and activeness (traditionally masculine traits) ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .59$) that characterize shojo heroines. By strongly agreeing that the typical heroine is characterized by both pro-social and active traits, and by responding that their ideal heroine would have the same pro-social and active heroines, respondents indicate that

¹⁹ Since 1 represents "strongly agree" and 5 represents "strongly disagree," the lower the mean, the more the respondents indicated that they enjoyed shojo or preferred it to American entertainment.

Table 5: Comparison of Analyzed and Unanalyzed Heroines

	Analyzed Heroines	Unanalyzed Heroines
Shōjo Enjoyment	$M = 1.79$ ($SD = .39$)	$M = 1.94$ ($SD = .46$)
Prefer Shōjo to General Girlhood Entertainment	$M = 1.86$ ($SD = .55$)	$M = 2.04$ ($SD = .69$)
Prefer Shōjo to Fantasy Entertainment	$M = 2.13$ ($SD = .72$)	$M = 2.24$ ($SD = .80$)

they are aware of shōjo heroines' various and diverse character traits, and that they appreciate the merger of traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics.

Kawaii. Moreover, we see that the audience members respond negatively to one of shōjo's primary feminist limitations: the heroine's *kawaii* (cute) nature. Shōjo heroines for all of their maturity and agency are given a "cute flaw" which makes them, definitionally, *kawaii* (cute); this cute flaw most often manifests in shōjo heroines as a "space-i-ness": the heroines are occasionally ditzy and unaware in child-like oblivion. And respondents reported their perception of this by strongly they agreed, or disagreed that the typical heroine and/or their ideal heroine would be *Silly/Ditzy*. Just as my rhetorical analysis indicated that this trait is at odds with the heroine's otherwise pro-feminist characteristics, the respondents indicated that audience members do not like this silly/ditzy characteristic and would omit it if they were creating their ideal shōjo heroine. This is further confirmed by my message board analysis as demonstrated later.

Relating to the Heroine. In keeping with the theories of Parasocial Relationships and Wishful Identification which suggests that the greater one's involvement with a media persona (the more often one reads/watches a shōjo heroine) the greater your parasocial relationship and level of wishful identification, we see a correlation between respondents who spend increased time involved in shōjo also develop stronger parasocial relationships and wishfully identify with the heroine. Moreover, it makes sense women would wishfully identify with heroines to a greater extent than men, although it is significant that both genders responded that they wishfully identify with the heroines. This indicates that, as demonstrated in my rhetorical analysis, shōjo heroines portray

traditionally masculine characteristics – so that men can wishfully identify with her, and that the narratives define traditionally feminine traits (friendliness, kindness, self-sacrifice, etc) as necessary for *human* maturity, not femininity. Hence, even male audience members can wishfully identify with shōjo heroines.

Comparison to American Girlhood Entertainment. In keeping with my rhetorical analysis that suggested that shōjo offered more pro-feminist heroines and narrative structures than general girlhood entertainment, respondents indicated that shōjo was generally more positive, with better characters and plots, and that they preferred shōjo to Western Girlhood Entertainment. This further suggests audience members enjoy shōjo's approach to the five common girlhood themes of 1) sexuality/dating, 2) patriarchal hierarchies, 3) inscribed femininity – body sculpting, 4) Girl Power/Mean Girls, and 5) consumerism, which is decidedly more pro-feminist than general American girlhood entertainment. Consider Figure 16, which is a bar graph detailing the categories by which participants compared shōjo to general girlhood entertainment:

Also in keeping with my rhetorical analysis, respondents indicated that shōjo and fantasy girlhood entertainment are more similar than shōjo and general girlhood entertainment: they still preferred shōjo to fantasy entertainment, but to a lesser extent. As suggested in my rhetorical analysis, fantasy girlhood entertainment such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* each try (with varying success) to position feminist heroines in (dubiously) feminist plot structures, which makes fantasy girlhood entertainment more similar to shōjo.

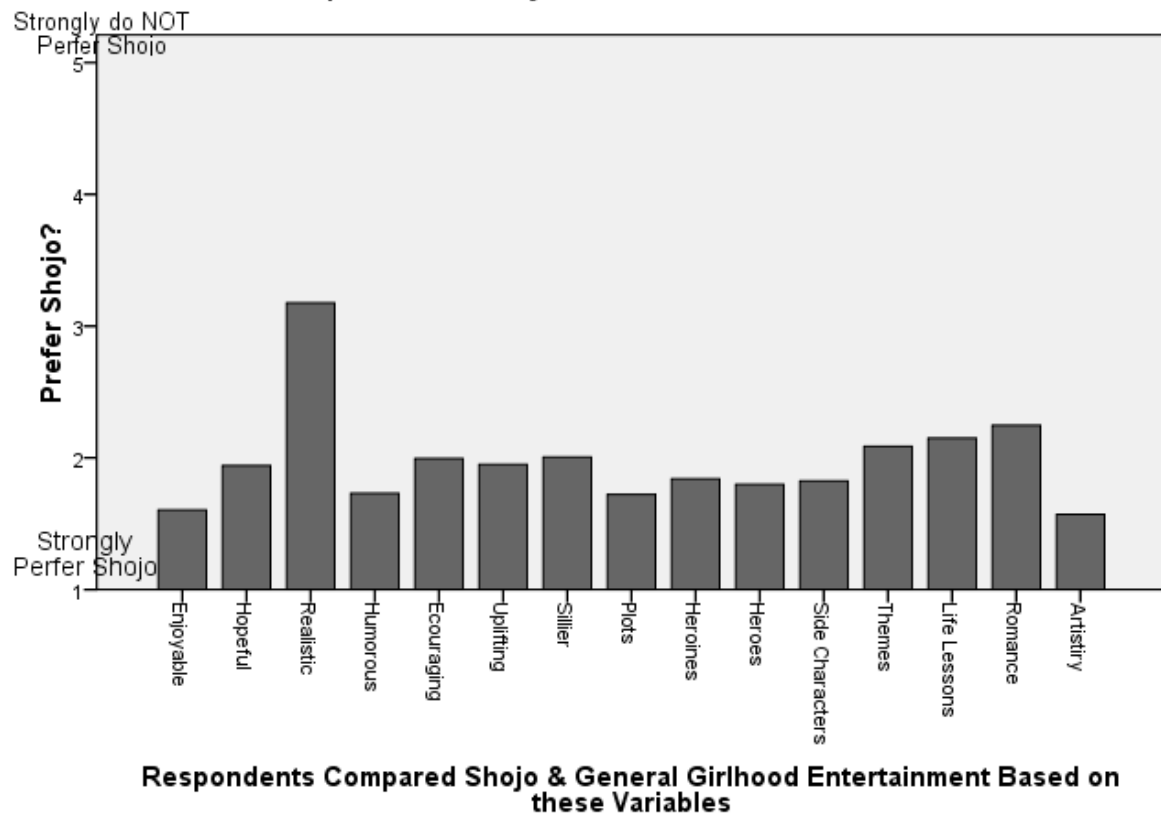


Figure 16: Detailed Comparison of Shōjo to General Girlhood Entertainment

Overall, this audience survey provided strong results of parasocial relationships and wishful identification with the heroines, that audience members recognize the mixture of pro-social and active character traits in the heroine, and that audience members prefer shōjo to general girlhood entertainment, and to a lesser extent, fantasy girlhood entertainment. This survey provided new data regarding audience members' interactions with and perceptions of shōjo, since this was the first shōjo audience survey conducted within the communication field.

Open Ended Responses

Respondents' answers to the open ended question "What draws you to shōjo? In other words, what do you like about shōjo?" reveals a strong correspondence to Fisher's Narrative Paradigm. Audience members indicated their *identification* with shōjo, and their conceptualization of its *coherence* and *fidelity*. This open ended question gave audience members a space to reflect on why they liked shōjo, and these answers primarily fit the three categories of *identification*, *coherence*, or *fidelity*. Some respondents had a hard time quantifying what they like about shōjo:

"I avidly read Hana Yori Dango although I don't know why; the drawing is bad and the characters are disagreeable"

"I frst got interested through a friend and I just fell oin love with. but if I had to explain exactly why...I could not really say." [sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

Others had ready answers:

"The strong balance between both romance and humor in several series, the realistic elements evident in some series, and the usually very attractive boys."

"The effect it has on your emotions is what makes shoujo great, its ability to make you laugh or cry depending on the situation. It allows you to get in touch with yourself again."

“1. The beautifully drawn guys and their level of loyalty (as well as the heroine's) to the one they love 2. Their complexity and relation to real-life struggles 3. The way love is generally depicted - this idea that: ‘I'm all right as long as I can be next to you’ 4. The heroine's earnestness, and her desperate desire to truly understand the one she loves”
[sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

Identification

Respondents indicated a strong identification with the heroines' values, hopes, and perspective. Audience members appreciated heroines who are simultaneously ideal characters and yet have relatable flaws. Consider the following anonymous responses:

“Shojo idealizes the strengths and complexities of a girl and often, the heroines themselves have faults and insecurities that are relatable even in their extreme circumstances.”

“Every series is different - just like real people. You will always find someone you can relate to.”

“When I was younger (the character's age): I could identify with the characters and the events in their lives. At age 26: I reminisce about how I felt when I first watched that anime, or when I was the character's age.”

“It's relatable to a girl like e. Some of the things that happen to those girls are things I secretly wish would happen to me, as embarrassing as that is.”

“heroines that aren't perfect but still strive to be good people and sometimes fail but sometimes succeed and because they are 'believable' in that sense I can identify with that and care about whether they succeed or not.”

“The heroines are more like average girls. They are not the busty skimpy dressed girls of other genres. The heroines are easier to relate to.”

“I like seeing a girl that I can feel attracted to and that I can empathize with. I enjoy seeing her grow and develop as a person and overcome the obstacles placed in front of her.”

“I like shoujo because I think the storylines and character interactions hit on a lot of insecurities that readers experience. Most often, I believe the message most often relayed by shoujo manga is: ‘It's okay to be yourself.’”

“I like how a person can really relate to some of the characters, because when i was little i did not have too many friends to hang out with and so i started watching anime when i was about 8. It was Sailor Moon and it was just so cool to want to grow up and be just like her. It was really a good escape to feel comfortable.”

[sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

Respondents also indicated that they appreciate the heroines particularly because they are strong independent characters. Consider the following responses as audience members explain how they perceive shōjo heroines:

“I enjoy seeing women portrayed as deep characters”

“There are strong females that can take on the males.”

“I'm attracted to this genre because it's hard to find GOOD American comics that star women. They're out there, but they aren't the mainstream. I can enjoy a manga about the drama and comedy of a girl chasing her true love as much as the next lady, but I feel that happens far too much in shojo manga. I love comics that star well-developed, multi-faceted (fully-clothed) female characters in general - Japanese, Indian, American, whatever.”

“Opportunities for female characters to display wide ranges of personalities, relationships, and traits without being overshadowed by male characters.”

“I also like it when the females are strong-willed and not always relying on the men for help, or even if they have to, they try very hard to stand up for themselves. As a girl, this makes me feel I am not alone in my own personality.”

“I really like how strong a lot of the characters are. For instance, a character like Tohru (Fruits Basket) has suffered a lot, but still has the strength to help others. I also enjoy how they never give up no matter the odds against them.”

“I started watching shojo anime and manga when I was very young, and it was one of the few venues where strong female leads were portrayed at the time. They were role models and superheros and showed me girls could be strong on their own, and didn't need to rely on men to make their decisions.”

“I'm more interested in a strong female lead without a lot of romantic interest. I love series with crossdressing/gender-bending. Series that stray from the traditional love story are more likely to capture my interest.”

“It's one of the few mediums that allows female characters to display their strengths and form genuine bonds with other female characters.”

“The sparkles, the cutesy outfits, and the strong main heroine.”

“Kickass female characters!”

“Girl or woman in leading role & usually saving the world, a country, a city or town, her people, her family, &/or her friends.”

“It is uplifting to women and, at times, can deliver realistic/meaningful lessons. Oh, and its fun to watch!”

“i like the complexity of the characters and themes in the shojo because some series address social, cultural, and moral values and others bring a humanistic feel to the characters involved (given the situation). i think that shojos are great for young girls who are seeking a better understanding of feminism through a female heroine/vigilante and teaches them inner self confidence.” [sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

Coherence

Respondents also answered this open ended question by commenting on the plots and the coherent narrative structure. Consider the following responses:

“The pacing is usually a nice change from other genres of popular anime. Generally I like the "slice of life" feeling I see in many Shojo stories, and then enjoy them even further when a good twist or interesting hook is thrown in. Also, characters have a tendency to develop along different, if not flat-out stronger lines.”

“Solid Story Lines”

“The simple story line at first but with the introduction of characters and plot twists (and drama) keep you wanting more.”

“The plotlines are generally more complex than American and the art styles are very different from Americans. The premises are usually outlandish but still pulled off as something really awesome and 'makes sense' even if it's something like falling into another world via a magic book, or getting flushed down a toilet.”

[sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

In the 280 responses to the question, “What draws you to shōjo?” the word *plot* was featured 48 times and the word *story* was featured 59 times as respondents explained that they enjoy shōjo narratives because of the plot and storylines.

Fidelity

Finally, respondents answered the question, “What draws you to shōjo?” with comments relating to shōjo’s *fidelity* – its representation of reality and relationship to what audience members perceive as human nature. Generally, respondents indicated that shōjo has a high level of fidelity. This is nuanced by the fact that respondents usually indicated either that shōjo portrays reality within the context of a fantasy world or that shōjo portrays an ideal reality – what audience members wish the world was like.

Consider the following responses:

“The relationship between the heroine and the watcher/reader. The plausibility of it all, that the heroine is not perfect, but is loved nonetheless.”

“I’m fond of the semi-realistic predicaments. It SEEMS like it could happen, but then again, how often do you have seven guys crushing on you?”

“It has the fake real stuff you kinda wish happened in real life. It absolutley ridiculous.”

“I dabble in this genre still for the emotional depth of series such as Fruits Basket, and its greater realism compared to Hollywood drama targeted toward the same audience.”

“Romance; somewhat likeness to real life, yet fantasy influenced”

“what I like most about it is the hopeful air you get near the end of a series that tells you everyone with enough heart will always come out happy in the end, which is a great ray of hope for the big-hearted but shy like myself. "Someday my prince/princess will come" and all that.”

“I’m a hope-less romantic and I like the "it could happen" aspect of them”

“The life stories. The way they are explained, and see that life is full of wonders”

“It's a alternate universe where everything a girl wants in a relationship usually happens in some form or another, but it still has enough of the real world where you can still relate.”

“Well, it's pretty realistic even when it's not.”

“I like how the characters go through real life problems. Granted it's stretched to the obviously unreal sense, but I relate to the characters.”

“It's especially nice to see stories where girls can be heroines that deal with real issues. A good shojo anime is cathartic and leaves me feeling good.”

“I also like the life lessons in shoujo manga. It sounds kind of silly, but sometimes, they teach you how to see things from other people's perspectives and be a better person. I guess, anyway.”

“The main characters are usually regular girls.”

“It deals with real life types of events. It may not be exactly like my life, but there are similarities.”

“Shojo manga and anime can be related to current events in many girls' lives and can help them cope with what's wrong.”

“I love the realistic interaction of the people within the story. You can truly believe their struggles.”

“how an ordinary high school student goes to other worlds making friends, falling in love, and just maybe saving the world”

[sic Anonymous Survey Responses]

Message Board Analysis

The open ended questions in the audience survey offered glimpses of respondents' perceptions of shōjo – the respondents were explaining their interactions with shōjo to an outside third party (me, the researcher). In order to hear the girls' voices directly commenting on shōjo while actively involved in their shōjo fan base, I have conducted a message board analysis, reviewing the posts and chat-forums that

shōjo fans write. I limited my analysis primarily to the *OneManga.com* message board forums since this is a popular and highly active site for shōjo fans: audience members are able to read manga chapters that are published in Japan before they are published in America due to a fan-subbing and scanning service that the *OneManga* administrators coordinate – hence fans read the latest chapters on part of the site and then discuss the manga on the associated message board forums. Since *Fruits Basket* is the top selling shōjo in America, I widened my analysis to include the audience-generated message boards hosted on the *Fruits Basket* Facebook Group.

Shōjo narratives often had a variety of message board threads with topics spanning plot spoilers, favorite quotes, favorite characters, anticipation for the next episode, and romantic interests. The more popular a narrative the more message board threads were associated with it. Hence, *Fruits Basket*, *Vampire Knight*, *Hana-Kimi*, and *Ouran High School Host Club* had the most active and varied threads of the shōjo narratives I analyzed.

Of the six shōjo-genre narratives I rhetorically analyzed, I limited my message board analysis to *Fruits Basket* and *Vampire Knight* since these two narratives generated the most fan interaction and because these two texts are fairly dissimilar in their plot and tone so, together, they represent a fair spectrum of shōjo narratives. I included the three Gender Bender narratives, *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran High School Host Club* in my message board analysis because these three texts each had a different portrayal of gender bending and I wanted to include the audience's reaction to each of these gender portrayals. For *Vampire Knight*, *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran*, I limited my analysis

to overview threads, which were titled variations of “*Discuss (Name of Shōjo Narrative) Here.*” Due to the sheer number of *Fruits Basket* threads, I concentrated on two more narrowly focused threads, “*Why do you Like Tohru?*” and “*Lessons I Learnt After Watch Fruits Basket.*” Throughout these message board threads, I found substantial evidence of parasocial relationships, some evidence of wishful identification, and a general appreciation of the heroines’ agency and/or gender transcendence.

Broadly speaking, message board topics stemmed around the following five themes: 1) humor – fans remembered and commented on humorous elements; 2) Plot – fans commented on and speculated about plot developments; 3) Romance – fans suggested romantic pairings and expressed enjoyment of romantic events; 4) Characters – fans expressed enjoyment of their favorite characters; and 5) Self-Expression – fans shared about themselves, usually in relation to shōjo. These five themes generally express the content groupings found on shōjo message boards. However, since in each of these topics, fans would comment on their relationship with the heroine, and how or why they liked a particular shōjo narrative, I have organized my analysis to first address the interaction between fans and the heroine, then the fans’ description of the heroine’s character, and finally, the fans’ conceptualization of gender in relation to the heroine.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships are longstanding relationships that audience members form with media personas, often measured through the audience members’ conceptualizing the media persona as a friend, through the breadth of interaction the audience member extends towards the media persona (following other media/narratives

with the same persona or actor, length of time invested in the media persona, etc), and emotional and/or behavioral responses the audience members develop through their interactions with the media persona. The message boards indicate that audience members develop parasocial relationships with shōjo heroines as they conceptualize the heroine as a friend, seek out other media venues (such as fan art) to the heroine, and develop an emotional connection to the heroine.

Heroine as Friend. In parasocial relationships, audience members relate to the media persona as if he or she were their friend – believing that if the media persona were a “real” person he or she would be an ideal friend. Shōjo message boards suggest that many fans enter into this parasocial friendship with shōjo heroines, believing that the heroine would make the ultimate friend. I found the particular thread, “*Why Does Everyone Like Tohru?*”²⁰ insightful because the responses were generated by an antagonistic posting:

Roadinger: why does everyone like Tohru? cause i seriously dont get it. is it just the whole stupid girl thing? [sic *Like Tohru?*]

The following are a sampling of responses generated by the above question:

Hendricks: Yeah, she's kinda ditsy and doesn't think of herself enough, but she holds up incredibly well and always looks at the positive side of life even after losing her mother and living in a tent for months. She's wise beyond her years and she always manages to say the right thing to make others feel better. She is able to dig deep into a persons emotions and when she does that they LET IT ALL OUT. It's an amazing thing. She's also just a nice, indiscriminate person who would be friends with anyone and would do anything to help.

Santos: I think Tohru would be a great friend to have.

Roche: I think Tohru is a wonderful person and would make a great friend.

²⁰ Tohru, the *Fruits Basket* heroine, is the most pro-social of the heroines I analyzed and, arguably, also the ditzy-est; she is often clueless, silly, bumps into things and falls down regularly.

Lucas: Tohru is like your ideal best friend ...:D... someone to make you smile
and laugh She's simply great..... [sic *Like Tohru?*]

Shōjo fans actively participate in fantasizing over shōjo heroines, imagining these characters are humanly realistic and would want to be their friend; for example, “Tohru is amazing, even though she's not perfect; her flaws make her even more amazing. I'm sorry, but if she were perfect, she wouldn't be as appealing because that would just be unrealistic. Every human being has flaws, including Tohru” (*Like Tohru*).

The On-Going Parasocial Relationship. Parasocial relationships are primarily audience maintained as audience members seek out other/continued access to the media persona. For shōjo fans, the parasocial relationship is usually maintained by continuing to follow a series (waiting for the next episode starring the heroine), reading other series created by the same artist, creating/obtaining heroine art (online videos, sketches, and/or fan fiction), listening to soundtracks, meeting voice actresses or artists at Anime Conventions, cosplaying²¹ as the heroine, quoting and/or mimicking the heroine, and introducing other friends to the heroine by showing them the series.

On shōjo message boards, fans maintain their parasocial relationships with shōjo heroines primarily by anticipating the next episode, seeking out plot-spoilers, posting quotes or photos of the heroines, and recommending their favorite series/artists to others. For example, an individual expressed her involvement in *W Juliet* in the following manner,

Melusinespuppet: IIII LLLLLLLLLLOOOOOOOOVVVVVVVEEEEEEE W

²¹ Anime/manga fans “cosplay” (a combination of the words “costume” and “play”) which means to dress up as an anime/manga character and possibly impersonate him or her.

Juliet! It's the only series I would buy if it was long. 🇺🇸 I own all published books (11). It's so so sad only 3 more volumes left!!! 😞 At least Hana-Kimi [a similar shōjo] lasts about 23 volumes. 😊 [...] Does anyone know what other stories Emura [*WJuliet's* artist] writes?

[sic *W Juliet*]

Other fans maintain their parasocial relationships by rereading/watching episodes, creating shōjo art, and recommending the series to others. Consider the following excerpts from the OneManga *Hana-Kimi* message board forum:

Ghassassin: I've seen the [*Hana-Kimi*] Live Action Drama [a TV show remake of *Hana-Kimi*], about gazillion times. Seriously, no kidding. Don't ask me why, but the thing never gets old.

Ariin: I've been reading it for two days now (currently on chapter 68) and I LOVE IT!!!!!! I even made a music video thingy with some screen shots!!!! Done with the song "By your side" by Tenth Avenue North. It is the perfect song for this manga!!! *river of tears* Check it out!

CrimsonN.WingS: I remember when Mizuki kept sleeping in Sano's bed. xD Those moments were so nice~! >=) I want to read it again! /goes to OM main site [where she can read it again online].

BethhyTheMokona: Hana Kimi is one of my all time favourite mangas. I would recommend it to people who have never read manga before.

[sic *Hana-Kimi*]

Empathetic Responses to Shojo. Parasocial relationships can generate both emotional and behavioral responses, as audience members engage with the media persona. Although it is difficult to ascertain behavioral responses²² from a message board analysis, audience members actively reported emotional responses in the message board postings. Of the three types of emotional responses: *empathetic reactions* in which “viewers may experience (virtually) the same emotions as a persona is expressing,” *persona-generated emotions* in which observing the persona causes the

²² One might argue that the act of participating in message board forums is itself a behavioral response to a parasocial relationship, but the actual text on the message board forums rarely indicates behavioral changes.

viewer to experience an emotion, and *mood contagion* in which the persona's mood is automatically and unintentionally absorbed by the viewer (Klimmt 298-299) audience members seem to report more persona-generated emotions than the other two emotional responses. Audience members report experiencing humor, happiness, joy, and/or giddiness during funny moments, plot resolutions, and romantic climaxes. Audience members also report sadness, frustration, even crying at tragic plot events or at the conclusion of a series. Consider the following excerpts from the OneManga *Hana-Kimi* message board forum:

Hana-Kimi112: I absolutly love this manga*hence, the name*. So far I have read it 7 times, and all in one week. I read alot, can ya tell? But every time I read it, I still roll around laughing at the funny parts, and cry at the sad parts; it never gets old.

BethhyTheMokona: There were comedy, romance, drama; it's worth the read. I cried at the end.

CrimsoN.WingS : hana kimi is a wonderful manga, cos it has all sweet moments n all the character were also funny ;D sometimes i cant stop laughing hehee. [sic *Hana-Kimi*]

Here, audience members express their emotional involvement with shōjo series. These series evoke strong emotional reactions (laughter and tears) in audience members.

These audience generated message boards indicate that audience members develop strong parasocial relationships with shōjo heroines. By creating a sense of friendship with the heroine, imagining that if she were real, she would be the their friend, then actively maintaining the relationship through extensive media contact, and emotionally responding to the heroine, shōjo audience members enact the classic markings of parasocial relationships.

Wishful Identification

In accordance with my survey results, I found less evidence of wishful identification than parasocial relationships. However, there was some evidence that shōjo audience members actively compare themselves to shōjo heroines and wish to be more like the heroines. Consider the following excerpts as audience members contemplate *Fruits Basket's* heroine, Tohru:

Lucas: [Tohru is] so kind and understanding. She's always willing to listen to all their problems and help them whenever they need it. In many ways she reminds me of myself. i also Luv Tohru because Tohru and I are so alike.

Tellinghuisen: It's because she's so kind and understanding. She's always willing to listen to all their problems and help them whenever they need it. In many ways she reminds me of myself.

Beckman: i like her. in the sense that she's an awesome character, and a great role model. i thought i was a pretty obtimistic person, till i met tohru. i've got nothing on her. [sic *Like Tohru*]

Here we see audience members comparing themselves to a shōjo heroine and suggesting similarities between their personalities. The final quote by “Beckman” is the clearest indication of wishful identification I found in this message board analysis and suggests that some fans actively understand shōjo heroines as role models. However, I generally found that message boards contained little conclusive evidence of wishful identification.

Heroine's Agency and Pro-sociality

The shōjo heroines' agency – their power to choose and act – is often commented on by audience members as they consider the heroine's importance to the plot and her ability to affect the plot trajectories. Moreover, audience members often comment on heroine's pro-social qualities, expressing appreciation for these pro-social character types:

Santos: [Tohru] ROCKS! She's NICE. She's SINCERER, GENUINE, LOOKS FOR THE GOOD IN ALL PEOPLE (EVEN IF THEY TREAT HER LIKE CRAP)... THINKS ABOUT OTHERS B/F HERSELF... UNSELFISH. KIND. MOTHERLY. SWEET. GREAT COOK. LIFTS YOUR SELF-ESTEEM. TRIES TO THINK POSITIVE EVEN THOUGH SHE'S BEEN THROUGH CRAP (MOM DEAD, DAD is DEAD, LIVED IN A TENT, AKITO GIVING HER A HARD TIME). WILLING TO MAKE OTHERS HAPPY (AND SHE'S SINCERE ABOUT IT).
[sic *Like Tohru*]

Audience members particularly comment on heroine's agency/pro-sociality in light of their troubled and difficult pasts. The heroine's personality is often regarded as a triumph of character. Consider the following posting which focuses on Tohru's agency (ability to rescue the boys from the zodiac curse) in light of her background,

Lucas: Tohru's been through so much in her childhood and for her to still be as strong as she is now..is incredible.. Tohru has also helped out all the members of the zodiac one way or another....emotionally and physically....
[sic *Like Tohru*]

Other audience members comment on the heroine's disadvantaged social/economic position and her ability to overcome these difficulties and cultivate a pro-social personality,

Connor: What's great about Tohru is that she's flawed - she's SUPER airheaded, and clumsy, and she's not filled with social graces or anything, and she's not even particularly talented at anything. But despite all that, she works hard and succeeds. But even more than all that, she legitimately LOVES everyone she meets. Her kindness isn't borne of pity or a need to make people like her or a feeling of obligation. She just honestly cares for people, hurts when they hurt, and wants them to be happy again. And she never resents anyone for taking her help - she just keeps giving it.
[sic *Like Tohru*]

Audience members often mix elements of humor and appreciation of a heroine's agency/pro-sociality. Consider these excerpts from a list compiled by audience members titled "Things I Learnt after Watching *Fruits Basket*,"

1. Be careful when hugging the opposite sex
2. Especially when their last name is Sohma
30. Live life to it's fullest.
32. Also be grateful for what you are given and what you currently have.
35. If you work too hard, you'll get a fever.
37. People have their reasons of who they are and how they are like
38. When people have bad attitudes, it's usually because they're hurting inside.
40. Kindness is the key to every person's heart.
43. How to speak German [sic *Things I Learnt*]

List items 1, 2, 35, and 43 are humorous postings which reference certain humorous moments in different *Fruits Basket* episodes. Mixed in are items 30, 32, 38, and 40 which are “Life Lessons” that the heroine, Tohru, teaches other characters (and the audience by extension) throughout the series.

Finally, audience members occasionally reference the heroine’s ability to act and pro-social impulse toward actions in comparison to other characters who lack either the power or the will to act. In the following excerpt, “Iron Maiden” compares Yuuki, *Vampire Knight*’s heroine, to other lead characters in the narrative,

Iron Maiden: Kaname [one of the heroes] seems more interested in running away with Yuuki to live like Haruka and Juuri rather than anything else. Haruka and Juuri had an isolationist stance and it seems that Kaname does too. Yuuki on the other hand actively takes it upon herself to help be the solution for other people’s problems. [sic *Vampire Knight*]

Audience members recognize shōjo heroines’ agency – power to act, and their pro-sociality – willingness to act on others’ behalf. This is emphasized in relation to the heroines’ difficult background, personal disadvantages, and in light of how traditionally powerful characters (rich, privileged, male characters) refuse to, or cannot act.

Gender Transcendence

Finally, audience members recognize and appreciate the Gender Bender subgenre, and its ability to create characters who occasionally transcend gender. Of the three Gender Benders I rhetorically analyzed, *Hana-Kimi* is the only narrative which begins with the heroine enacting the gender norms associated with her sex – Mizuki first appears as a girl explaining why she intends to cross-dress. *Hana-Kimi* never tests the audiences' gender expectations, thereby undermining its ability to transcend gender norms. It is, therefore, unsurprising that I found few references to gender norms or expectations in the *Hana-Kimi* message board forums. Instead, I found extreme statements declaring that this was an “all time favorite” shōjo for many audience members, yet they experienced difficulty recommending the series to friends, due to its cross-dressing themes,

CrimsonN.WingS: when I reccomend [Hana-Kimi] to my friends and tell them what it's about, they just call me weird: "It's about this **girl** going to an **all guy school**, so she **dresses up as a guy** so she can meet the boy that she adores. Early on the **Gay** school docter finds out that she is a girl, and another student **boy falls in love** with her **thinking she is a guy**. Thus comes out a Love Triangle and the basic Plot." And after I say that, I get given wierd looks from every directoin. =.="

[sic emphasis in original *Hana-Kimi*]

The audience's discomfit over explaining the cross-dressing component is in direct contrast to the series' exuberance as its tag-line reads, “The prettiest boy in school... isn't a boy!” (*Hana-Kimi*); and a version of this tag-line, “What happens when the hottest guy in school is a girl?!?” is featured on many of the series advertisements (advertised in *W Juliet* episode 1, page 186). This disconnect likely indicates a “in-group/out-group” difference where long-standing shōjo audience members (in-group)

are attracted to this series by these tag-lines and declare that *Hana-Kimi* is an “all-time favorite” because of its cross-dressing. Yet they experience difficulties in expressing to non-shōjo-audiences (out-group) why they enjoy these series and experience difficulty stimulating out-group interest in the series.

W Juliet, which originates with both the hero and heroine cross-dressed and originally fools the audience – violating gender expectations, is generally well received. The postings on message board forums generally expressed enjoyment of the series, and of the heroine, Ito, in particular. Postings likened this series to *Hana-Kimi* as a cross-dressing narrative, but then went on to express their enjoyment of the gender transcendence. Consider the following excerpts from the TokyoPop *W Juliet* message board forum:

Sakenichi: I have decided after many many manga series that W Juliet is my all-time favourite. I can relate to Ito [...] What can I say? My favourite series seem to end up being ones where one of the main characters is a crossdresser XD Another of my favs in this category is Hana-Kimi.

AmyIshida: I seriously thought it was a shounen-ai²³ manga when I first read it. XD I knew the long haired girl was really a guy but I never knew the Ito was actually a girl. ^^;; Even after reading the first volume, I couldn't accept that she was a "she". Although, after 6 volumes, I have gotten use to it. ^^ It's such a great series.

Murasakivie: I love W-Juliet! Did anyone else think that it was about lesbians when you first started reading it? I seriously did!

Fangirl: I love this manga. When I first read it, I had a very hard time believing that Ito was actually a girl. [sic *W Juliet*]

Naturally not all audience members appreciate how *W Juliet* originally violates gender expectations,

²³ Shounen-ai is the technical term for the “Boy-Love” genre – narrative which feature two male protagonists who enact a homosexual romance.

Annette: I bought it and didn't like it. I thought the girl was the guy. 🤔
[sic *W Juliet*]

Message board discussion of *Ouran High School Host Club* primarily stemmed around the romantic possibilities since the heroine, Haruhi, has the entire Host Club and many other options from which to choose a romantic partner. Shōjo fans generally appreciate the “reverse harem” effect,

Chocolate_Chip_Cookie: It's a fun and imaginative manga. The only other manga which has a reverse harem as good as this one is Perfect Girl Evolution, I think. this shoujo manga surpasses about 95% of all the shoujo mangas I've read.
[sic *Ouran*]

However, the romantic theme takes an interesting turn in *Ouran* message board forums since Haruhi refuses to enter into the romantic realm and fans generally comment upon her lack of a romantic nature. After a post accusing Haruhi of refusing romantic advances due to a “frozen heart,” the following defense developed,

Kurapika: Its not really a frozen heart though, its just shes...kinda dumb when it come to love, ... shes just not really good at understanding these things.
Slyer: i agree i think she is like that because she is so focus in her dream.
Kurapika: Well thats a part of it, but its kinda just her personality really, she just... she just never thinks along the romantic lines. [sic *Ouran*]

Here, audience members recognize that Haruhi personality is non-romantic, that she is busy following her dream to become a lawyer instead of pursuing romantic relationships.

Conclusion

Through this audience survey and message board analysis, we can see that shōjo's audience develops strong relationships with the heroines, perceives the heroine as a mixture of pro-sociality and activeness (traditionally masculine and feminine traits), develops parasocial relationships and/or wishfully identifies with the heroines, and

prefers shōjo to American girlhood entertainment. Audience members perceive shōjo as an alternative entertainment medium to American girlhood entertainment, and prefer shōjo's characters, plot lines, themes, and values to American girlhood entertainment.

In terms of Fischer's Narrative Paradigm, both the survey and message board analysis confirmed that audience members report a high level of *identification* with shōjo characters. Audience members identify with the values, hopes, and perspectives portrayed in shōjo. Audience members also reported a high level of narrative *coherence* in shōjo – the story lines make sense and the plots hold together. Audience members also reported a high level of *fidelity*, shōjo narratives relate to the audience members' real life situations and experiences.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Shōjo offers pro-feminist messages in the most unlikely medium of American popular culture, comic books. Moreover, shōjo presents a pro-social and active heroine situated in a supportively feminist narrative structure in direct contrast with mainstream American girlhood entertainment and a significant improvement on the watered-down feminism of the girlhood fantasy entertainment which comprises the *magical feminism* genre. This thesis has used a mixture of rhetorical and quantitative methods in order to examine both the shōjo texts themselves and the audiences' perceptions of and reactions to shōjo. Considering the breadth of this research, I will briefly summarize my findings in relation to my original research questions, then consider the theoretical implications and limitations before offering my concluding remarks.

Three Analytical Endeavors

Prompted by shōjo's surprising growth in American girl culture, I began to analyze these texts, considering why they were popular. My preliminary analysis suggested that this genre was distinctive because of the heroine's pro-social/active characterization and the feminist narrative structures that under-girded these narratives. I then divided this research into three principle areas: the Shōjo Master Narrative, a Gender Bender Analysis, and an Audience Analysis with corresponding research questions.

The Shōjo Master Narrative

Realizing that gender relations differed in shōjo narratives from the corresponding American girlhood entertainment, I organized my research around the following bipartite research question: How is agency distributed between the heroine and the hero? and How is the narrative constructed to provide heroines with agency?

How is agency distributed between the heroine and the hero? Agency is equitably divided between the heroine and hero in shōjo narratives. The heroes have access to traditional power sources (wealth, family connections, prestige, and physical strength). While these sources offer them some agency – the power to choose and act – these heroes are just as often constrained by these sources: their families force them into unwanted careers/engagements; their wealth/prestige alienates them from their peers and they lead lonely, sad lives. Only their physical strength always functions agentially, empowering them to assist the heroine, who is often denied physical agency.

While the heroes are dubiously empowered through their traditional sources, the heroines derive their agency from internal characteristics. These heroines are simultaneously pro-social and active, combining traditionally feminine and masculine traits such as friendliness, optimism, kindness, and loyalty, bravery, and boldness. This unlikely combination empowers the heroines to trust their own judgment, make decisions, and oppose anti-sociality when they encounter it in villains and villainesses.

How is the narrative constructed to provide the heroines with agency? The narrative is structured to provide the heroines with agency by positioning them as active agents in a supportive plot. First, the narratives are structures around the heroine's

ability to emotionally rescue others. The plot structure centers around the heroine's agency: she decides to help others, and successfully completes her goal. Secondly, the narratives utilize love triangles to emphasize the heroine's agency: the heroine chooses between two equally good romantic options. Thirdly, the narratives situate the heroines as autonomous agents by removing any parental figures from the narratives: the heroines function as completely independent individuals, they have nearly complete control over every aspect of their lives – especially in relation to other characters. And finally, the shōjo master narrative is structured to provide the heroine with agency by featuring equitable romantic relations: the heroine and hero are equally devoted and mutually sacrificial, demonstrating an equally agentic and pro-feminist model of romance in popular culture.

Gender Bender Analysis

Intrigued by the mixture of traditionally feminine and masculine character traits that shōjo heroines displayed, I delved deeper in to gender representations by analyzing shōjo's Gender Bender subgenre. I organized this research around the following bipartite research question: How do the protagonists perform gender? Are traditional gender norms affirmed or subverted by the heroines and/or cross-dressing protagonists?

How do the protagonists perform gender? To answer this question, I analyzed the cross-dressing protagonists: Mizuki from *Hana-Kimi*, Makoto and Ito from *W Juliet*, and Haruhi from *Ouran High School Host Club*. Each of these protagonists performed gender in a slightly different way due to their different impetuses for cross-dressing. In *Hana-Kimi*, Mizuki performs gender as a costume – something she can put on and take

off. Upon starting her cross-dressing career, Mizuki “puts on” her male gender norms and although her costume is convincing to the majority of her male classmates, the audience (along with select characters) see through the costume to the girl underneath; thus, gender norms can be performed while gender identity (one’s sex and therefore “original” gender) is a fixed variable.

In *W Juliet*, Makoto (the only male cross-dressing protagonist) performs gender as a career: it is his job to perform female gender norms for the next two years. As such, gender is something that can be perfected – Makoto is the perfect woman; and gender performance is a task to complete and terminate. Makoto is only “performing” female – there is no consideration that when he enacts masculine gender norms he is “performing” male. So gender performance is malleable up to a point: gender norms can be perfectly imitated by a member of the opposite sex – Makoto can perform the ultimate girl, yet gender identity is nonnegotiable: Makoto is “naturally” male and the end of his cross-dressing career. Moreover, this termination is always in focus. In contrast, Ito (Makoto’s androgynous girlfriend) despite being female has to consciously perform femininity: her natural state is androgynous and she must consciously choose to perform female gender norms. She is originally presented to the audience as a boy, many characters (including Makoto) originally mistake her for a boy, and she often feels uncomfortable while performing female gender norms (such as wearing skirts, make-up, heels, etc). As such, while Makoto falls short in this narrative of presenting the optionality of all gender performances, Ito’s gender performance pushes this concept a little further in *W Juliet*.

In *Ouran*, Haruhi performs gender as an inconsequential trait. She is presented originally as a male character, she continues to perform as a male for nearly her entire school, she resists her friends' feminizing attempts, and generally considers herself androgynous. Not that she questions her sexuality or the "rightness" of her physicality, but rather, she considers gender to be an unimportant character trait. In fact, her performance as a man does not differ much from her performance as a woman – only her clothing changes, not her mannerisms, personality, or conversation. As such, Haruhi performs gender as an optional display – one she prefers not to engage in. By focusing on her grades and career regardless of any gender norms, Haruhi demonstrates the optionality of gender performance and chooses a middle ground that suits her lifestyle.

Are traditional gender norms affirmed or subverted by the heroines and/or cross-dressing protagonists? Generally speaking, gender norms are subverted through the cross-dressing protagonists in Gender Bender shōjos. Male and female characters demonstrate that they can adopt the other gender's behavior norms and imitate them successfully. This subverts the general assumption that men and women naturally behave differently by demonstrating that these norms are not *natural* (inherent, biological, necessary) but rather *learned* – since the cross-dresser can learn these socially constructed norms and successfully enact them. However, these narratives generally refrain from subverting the idea of gender identity: gender norms are malleable as men can perform femininity and women can perform masculinity, but at the end of the day men are men and women are women. There is a strong reinforcement of *essential gender* – even Haruhi who performs gender as an inconsequential trait as she

androgynously behaves is biologically female and therefore encounters “feminine” situations: heterosexual romance and rape threats.

Audience Analysis

In order to understand how the American shōjo audience understands these narratives, I conducted both an audience survey and an audience-generated message board analysis. My research was organized around the following multipart research question: How do audience members perceive shōjo heroines? Do these heroines stimulate parasocial relationships and/or wishful identification? Given how audience members relate to these heroines, how are the themes developed through these heroines received? and How do audience members understand shōjo in relation to American girlhood entertainment?

How do audience members perceive shōjo heroines? Survey respondents indicated that they perceive shōjo heroines as strongly pro-social ($M = 1.89$, $SD = .59$), strongly agreeing that heroines are friendly, kind, sacrificial, loyal, and value life. The respondents agreed with the rhetorical analysis that shōjo heroines are exceptionally pro-social. Similarly, respondents agreed that shōjo heroines are also active characters ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .59$), strongly agreeing that heroines are bold, determined, persevering, and intelligent characters. Hence, survey respondents indicated that they perceive both traditionally feminine and masculine traits in shōjo heroines.

Do these heroines stimulate parasocial relationships and/or wishful identification? According to my survey analysis, shōjo audiences develop parasocial relationships with the heroines, engaging in both parasocial maintenance behaviors

(anticipating the next episode, creating fan art, etc) ($M = 1.77$, $SD = .65$) and experiencing emotional behaviors commonly found in parasocial relationships ($M = 2.10$, $SD = .69$). Survey respondents indicated a lesser extent of wishful identification with the heroine ($M = 2.53$, $SD = .87$). And although boys wishfully identify with the heroines ($M = 2.44$) significantly less than girls do ($M = 2.82$) it is important to note that these heroines created by women and marketed to an exclusively female audience do generate a low level of wishful identification even from their male audience members.

Given how audience members relate to these heroines, how are the themes developed through these heroines received? Generally speaking, the themes developed in shōjo narratives are positively received by the audience members. In the message board analysis, audience members indicated that they understood the theme of pro-sociality – perceiving the heroine as and appreciating her pro-sociality, message board contributors described shōjo heroines as ultimate friends and role-models for their lives. Audience members also understood the heroines’ activeness as a positive theme, appreciating heroines’ agency especially in comparison to other characters who fail to act. Audience members also commented on shōjo’s themes of gender transcendence, appreciating the cross-dressing protagonists. Audience members expressed particular enjoyment of cross-dressing protagonists like Ito and Haruhi who they originally mistook for the other gender – indicating that audience members appreciate the narratives which more successfully subvert gender norms and hint at the optionality of all gender performances.

How do audience members understand shōjo in relation to American girlhood entertainment? Audience members understand shōjo as qualitatively different from American girlhood entertainment. Audience members choose to spend substantial amounts of time engaged in shōjo instead of American girlhood entertainment because they perceive shōjo as generally more positive and prefer shōjo's plots and characters to the American options. This is in keeping with my rhetorical analysis which suggested that shōjo texts are decidedly more pro-feminist than American entertainment and, therefore, appeal to a female audience.

Audience members preferred shōjo to both mainstream American girlhood entertainment ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .77$) and to fantasy girlhood entertainment (the *magical feminism* genre) ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .66$). This too was in keeping with my rhetorical analysis which suggested that the *magical feminism* genre was comparatively similar to shōjo (sequential narratives which feature a teen-aged heroine in a "normal" environment – high school – while maintaining an atmosphere of *otherness* and revolving around romantic tensions) but offered a less successful model of feminist entertainment.

Theoretical Implications

Considering the theoretical groundings and the mixed methodologies utilized throughout this thesis, this research contributes to several theoretical and methodological areas. Specifically, this research has theoretical implications for girlhood studies, intercultural studies, and audience reception studies in communication research.

Girlhood Studies

This research is situated in girlhood studies, utilizing feminist analysis and situating a new entertainment medium, shōjo, in relation to existing American girlhood entertainment.

General Girlhood Themes. This research synthesizes the varied research conducted in the field of communication on girlhood entertainment. By condensing the girlhood research and organizing the generically divided information in to five common girlhood themes, 1) sexuality/dating, 2) patriarchal hierarchies, 3) inscribed femininity – body sculpting, 4) Girl Power/Mean Girls, and 5) consumerism, this research emphasizes trends within American girlhood entertainment.

Magical Feminism(?). This research also contributes to the communication research being conducted on fantasy girlhood texts. Through considering the popular texts, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight*, this research suggests that feminism can be portrayed in narrative entertainment through two primary venues: the heroine's characterization and the narrative structure. Furthermore, this research points to successful rhetorical devices which portray pro-feminist values (physically, intellectually, and emotionally powerful heroines, peer relationships with supporting characters, and peaceful, equitable romances) while also highlighting elements of patriarchal backlash that suffuse even adamantly feminist texts (overly hostile environments, female sexual objectification, and controlling male characters).

Feminist Analysis. This research utilized feminist theories of agency and gender performance to analyze complex gender relations in both shōjo and its subgenre, Gender

Benders. In so doing, this research participates in third wave feminist methodologies, exploring power relations and hierarchies. Moreover, this research suggests that traditionally feminine and masculine traits can be successfully mixed to create an agentic heroine. This analysis points to a feminist example of equitable power distribution – more than a simple reversal of power/gender roles (where women are empowered and men are disempowered), this analysis suggests that, in keeping with feminist ideals of agency and gender performance, narratives can and are beginning to portray balanced gender relations.

By analyzing Gender Benders, exploring gender performance and issues of cross-dressing, this research suggested that cross-dressing stimulates two primary levels of romance: 1) *False Homosexual Attraction*: an individual is seemingly homosexually attracted to someone who appears to be the same sex – but is actually the opposite sex; and 2) *False Heterosexual Attraction*: an individual is seemingly heterosexually attracted to another person – who is actually passing – thus homosexual attraction.

Moreover, this research suggests, in keeping with gender performance theory that gender performance is a deeply nuanced, personal activity – even in fiction. The three Gender Benders, featuring four active cross-dressers (Mizuki, Makoto & Ito, and Haruhi), significantly differed in their portrayal of gender performance. This research suggests that gender can be performed as a costume (Mizuki – *Hana-Kimi*), a career (Makoto – *W Juliet*), an active production (Ito – *W Juliet*), or an inconsequential trait (Haruhi – *Ouran*).

Shōjo in Relation to American Girlhood Entertainment. This research further contributed to girlhood studies by analyzing shōjo in relation to American girlhood texts, interpreting narrative distinctions and their effects in shōjo narratives. This comparison offered concrete examples of how shōjo narratives feministically navigate plot developments and character traits that patriarchally infused American texts. This is not to say that shōjo has untroubled feminist representations, but rather that shōjo narratives have some successfully feminist rhetorical devices which American texts could incorporate.

By comparing texts such as *Buffy*, *Kim Possible*, and *Twilight* to the more successfully feminist shōjo narratives, this research also points to rhetorical devices that could be incorporated into the American girlhood entertainment: pro-social/active and happy heroines, absent authority figures to emphasize the heroines' agency and autonomy, equitable love triangles, and mutually edifying romances.

Intercultural Studies

As an intercultural text – originating in Japan and imported to the American market – shōjo stands as an example of entertainment globalization. In keeping with hybridity theories (Kraidy 2005) globalization is a heterogeneous process as local cultures maintain their own structure while incorporating new elements. This research offers an interesting example of this cultural hybridity since typical hybridity studies (especially in relation to entertainment) consider the effects of American entertainment on other cultures, while this research reverses that model. This research attempted to

maintain the Japanese context which contributes to these texts, while considering how these texts are consumed within the United States.

This research suggests that cultural knowledge or expertise can become a form of cultural capital – even in *counter flow* instances. The flow of globalization typically flows from cultures imbued with “the hegemonic power of colonial languages [English, Spanish, German, Portuguese, French, and Italian] in the domain of knowledge, intellectual production and cultures of scholarship” to other cultures (Mignolo 39, 41). However shōjo is an example of a counter flow (from Japan to America), where among American fans Japanese expertise functions as a commodity. On the audience-generated message boards knowledge of the Japanese language (spoken and its written forms), cultural, historical, and social knowledge offered a superiority and authority – making in-group/out-group distinctions even among committed audience members.²⁴ Further research needs to be conducted to understand how this *counter flow* version of cultural commoditization relates to its more standard iterations.

Audience Reception

This research utilizes quantitative research methods in order to better understand shōjo’s reception among American audiences. Drawing from the theories of Parasocial Relationships and Wishful Identification, this research indicates that audience members develop these intricate responses to shōjo heroines despite their unusual medium (comic

²⁴ To illustrate this point, I’d like to comment that a number of the open ended responses on my survey criticized my representation of shōjo: criticisms targeted my spellings when I utilized American spellings instead of the Japanese spellings, my use of the English titles instead of the Japanese titles (and vice-versa), and various responses, such as the following “shoujo is not a genre, it is a market, aimed at females of a certain age range, but spanning many genres. Romance is a genre. You are confusing your terms” (sic Anonymous Survey Response) criticized my understanding of shōjo in general.

books). This is significant because it reaffirms that audience members can develop parasocial relationships with and even wishfully identify with media characters who are significantly distanced from the audience member. Parasocial Relationships and Wishful Identification usually surround media personae such as news anchors, TV show hosts, and realistic protagonists – media portrayals which approximate *real life*. But this research indicates that both parasocial relationships and wishful identification can apply to cartoon figures in both graphic novels and TV animation.

Moreover, this research suggests that wishful identification persists beyond childhood – most Wishful Identification study focus on children wishfully identifying with TV characters. This research suggests that young adults (18 years and older) are developing wishful identifications with non-traditional media personae. Further research needs to be conducted focusing on the type of teenagers and adults who form wishful identifications and what sort of media personae they form these attachments with. Since this research was heavily concerned with textual, the survey portion does not have sufficient demographic and background information on the respondents to theorize concerning the type of individual who wishfully identifies with media personae throughout their adult life, but this research does suggest that pro-sociality and activeness are important traits for a model media persona.

Limitations

This analysis has a number of limitations and constraints that affect this research, ultimately pointing to the need for further research both in general girlhood studies and in consideration of these manga/anime texts.

First, as a researcher, I brought my own considerations to these texts. Generally speaking, some level of scholars' preconceived expectations, theoretical assumptions, and intellectual bias infiltrate their research. Despite the attempt at objectivity and theoretical rigor, this seepage usually occurs and can be very useful, we would not have scholarly activism if we always attempted to eradicate personal values from our scholarly endeavors. As a feminist, I am purposely looking for feminist models of entertainment in popular culture in order to analyze them, in order to recognize the rhetorical devices that function pro-feministly and uncover areas of continued patriarchal.

Moreover, I came to shōjo, originally, as a fan. After some experiences with shōjo movies such as *Spirited Away*, which originally confused me with their unusual medium, I was introduced to *Fruits Basket* and was overwhelmed by the sheer goodness of the heroine, Tohru Honda. Several years, and shōjo series later, equipped with the rhetorical skills, methodologies, and theories, I reconsidered these texts attempting to understand their appeal to American female audiences (such as myself).

The audience analysis has its own set of limitations, primarily concerned with the sample size. Although the survey was distributed to over 12,000 individuals across the United States, a high concentration of recipients (both the *A-kon Dallas* and *Aggime* manga/anime clubs) were from Texas. This could affect the results with a regional (Texan) bias. Moreover, although I started with a large sample size (524 survey results), only 385 of these were usable, reducing my sample size to a moderate result. Moreover, nearly a quarter (93 respondents, 24%) of my survey respondents was male, and gender

rarely significantly effected the survey responses, since my research is primarily involved in girlhood studies, I would have preferred to have more female respondents.

Additionally, the message board analysis is limited by the sheer magnitude of the project. There are innumerable audience-generated message boards, each offering significant and relevant comments on how audience members understand and interact with shōjo. Due to the sheer impossibility of covering all of this data, I limited my analysis primarily to the message boards posted on *OneManga.com* because of their representative nature. However, I found it necessary to further narrow my message board analysis again due to the daunting amount of message-board contributions, and therefore focused on *Fruits Basket* and *Vampire Knight* message boards as representative of the shōjo genre while considering the three Gender Bender series *Hana-Kimi*, *W Juliet*, and *Ouran* because the audiences' reactions to the different portrayals of gender relations was significant.

Similarly, considering the breadth of the shōjo and Gender Bender genres, I analyzed a narrow selection of these genres. However, I was careful to consider each text in view of its general popularity and comparison to other texts in the genre, in order to select texts which are representative in nature.

Additionally, due again to the magnitude of the project, I refrained from analyzing shōjo in comparison to other anime/manga genres and subgenres, which could offer a more nuanced view of how shōjo portrays gender relations. Further research projects in the field of communication could consider other shōjo subgenres, such as *Yaoi/Boy-Love* which is marketed to a female audience but features male-male

romances, or the effects of incorporating a standard shōjo heroine into a male-oriented plot structure, which is happening with increasing frequency as artists create *cross-over*²⁵ series to appeal to a wider audience.

Generally speaking, girlhood studies, entertainment hybridity, and portrayals of gender relations in adolescent media all need further analysis to understand these research areas better and contribute to the ongoing theoretical and methodological advances in communication studies. This is particularly true, first as it relates to niche audiences: shōjo audiences members are generally part of an American subculture and usually fall between the punk, Goth, Emo, and gamer cultures. As a subculture so closely related to these other marginalized elements of American society, further research on anime/manga audience members could contribute to communication scholarship on subcultures, in-group/out-group distinctions, group formation, and fandom.

Secondly, girlhood studies, intercultural studies, and analysis of anime/manga texts needs considerably more analysis that focuses on gender, class, and racial relations. Unfortunately much of the current scholarship paints a picture of a cohesive culture, with little or no room for internal hierarchies, differences, or sub-categories. The themes discussed in this synthesis of current girlhood scholarship are generalized to a mythical “monolithic American girl culture” when the texts actually deal explicitly with white, middle-to-upper-class girls. We need to understand the nuances of girl culture, which requires increased attention to the intersection of race, class, media, and girls. Given the

²⁵ Series which “cross-over” standard gender divisions, being marketed to both male and female audiences.

focus on gender relationships in this research, I was unable to delve in to a racial and class-based analysis of these shōjo texts, but such an analysis is certainly warranted.

Finally, more research needs be conducted in girlhood studies. Girlhood media needs to be understood in relation to other female-audience media. Studies need to compare girlhood media to girl-child media (such as Disney princesses, and Barbie) and to women's media (TV programs such as *Sex and the City*, romance novels, and magazines) in order to understand girlhood on a female-life continuum. Moreover, communication scholars need to continue collecting data about girlhood. We are significantly lacking in both quantitative and qualitative studies which could provide statistics, analysis, and interviews – bringing girls' voices into the academic realm.

Concluding Remarks

Shōjo has achieved remarkable popularity with American girls, succeeding where other comic books have failed. This research first provided a close critical analysis of shōjo texts, examining the messages and rhetorical devices featured throughout these narratives and then an audience reception study comprised of both a survey and message-board analysis. This research strongly indicates that these texts are feminist entertainment in the most unlikely area of popular culture – comic books – and that they appeal to their audience members through offering them heroines with a mixture of traditionally feminine and masculine character traits supported by a pro-feminist narrative structure. Moreover, audience members prefer shōjo to fantasy girlhood entertainment of the *magical feminism* genre which presents troubled versions of feminist entertainment.

This thesis suggests that shōjo develops from feminist motives, encourage a pro-feminist reality, and successfully markets itself to American girl culture because of its empowered heroines and portrayal of equality within romantic relationships.

WORKS CITED

ABC Family: Secret Life. ABC Family. 12 Nov 2008.

<http://abcfamily.go.com/abcfamily/path/section_Shows+Secret-Life-Of-The-American-Teenager/page_Detail>.

Ashihara, Hinako. *Sand Chronicles*. 2 vols to date. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, 2008-.

Auter, P.J. "TV That Talks Back: An Experimental Validation of a Parasocial Interaction Scale." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. **36** (1992): 173-181.

Barnes, Brooks. "Box-Office Pulse: Blood Lust Runs Hot." *The New York Times*. 24 Nov 2008. December 1, 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/24/movies/24box.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=Box-Office%20Pulse:%20Blood%20Lust%20Runs%20Hot&st=cse>.

Bellafante, Gina and Jeanne McDowell. "Bewitching Teen Heroines." *Time*. 5 May 1997. 24 Feb 2009.

<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,986288,00.html>>.

Bently, Mary. "The Body of Evidence: Dangerous Intersections between Development and Culture in the Lives of Adolescent Girls." *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*. Ed. Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 209-224.

Bowles-Reyer, Amy. "Becoming a Woman in the 1970s: Female Adolescent Sexual

- Identity and Popular Literature.” *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*. Ed. Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 21-48.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Carpenter, Susan. “An Author Who's Helped Girls to Grow; At Blumesday, Devotees Celebrate Judy Blume and her Groundbreaking Books on Sensitive Topics -- and Even Spend Time with the Writer.” *Los Angeles Times*. Wednesday, Home Edition 24 Sep 2008.
- Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Cohen, Jonathan. “Audience Identification with Media Characters.” *Psychology of Entertainment*. Ed. Jennings Bryant and Peter Vorderer. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006. 183-197.
- Crosby, Sara. “The Cruellest Season: Female Heroes Snapped into Sacrificial Heroines.” *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*. Ed. Sherrie Inness. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 153-180.
- Durham, Meenakshi Gigi. “The Girling of America: Critical Reflections on Gender and Popular Communication.” *Popular Communication*. **1** (2003): 23-31.
- Edward Cullen. Facebook. 1 Dec 2008.

<<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/s.php?init=q&q=edward%20cullen&ref=ts&sid=6f4aece00dfa37cf895d741414c43f79>>.

Emura. *W Juliet*. Ed. Megan Bates. Trans. William Flanagan. 14 vols. San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2004-2007.

Eyal, K. and Rubin, A. M. "Viewer Aggression and Homophily, Identification, and Parasocial Relationships with Television Characters." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. **47** (2003): 77-98.

Feilitzen, C. and O. Linne. "The Effect of Television on Children and Adolescents: Identifying with Television Characters." *Journal of Communication*. **25** (1975): 51-55.

Fisher, Walter. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.

Fiske, J. "The Cultural Economy of Fandom." *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*. Ed L. Lewis. London: Routledge, 1992. 30-49.

---. *Understanding Popular Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989.

Foss, Sonja. *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*. 3rd ed. Denver: Waveland Press, 2004.

Fruits Basket. By Natsuku Takaya. Dir. Akitaro Daichi. Perf. Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, Jerry Jewell, and John Burgmeier. Produced by Studio Deen. Fuji TV, FUNimation, 2001.

Fruits Basket Official Website. TV Tokyo, Furuba Project, FUNimation. 2003. 8 September 2006. <http://www.fruits-basket.com/fb_home.htm>.

- Gleiberman, Owen. "Movie Review: Twilight (2008)." *Entertainment Weekly*. 19 Nov 2008. 1 Dec 2008. <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20241357,00.html>>.
- Goffman, Erving. "Gender Display." *Female Hierarchies*. Ed. Lionel Tiger and Heather T. Fowler. Chicago: Beresford Book Service, 1978. 60-86.
- Golden, Christopher and Nancy Holder (with Keith R.A. DeCandido). *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide*. New York: Pocket, 1998.
- Goulart, Ron. *Comic Book Culture*. Portland, OR: Collectors Press, 2000.
- Gregson, Kimberly. "What If the Lead Character Looks Like Me? Girl Fans of Shōjo Anime and Their Websites." *Girl Wide Web: Girls, the Internet, and the Negotiation of Identity*. Ed. Sharon Mazzarella. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 121-140.
- Grossman, Lev and Richard Lacayo. "The Complete List." *Time*. 2005. retrieved Oct 12 2008. <http://www.time.com/time/2005/100books/the_complete_list.html>.
- Hains, Rebecca C. *Negotiating Girl Power: Girlhood Onscreen and in Everyday Life*. Diss. Temple University, 2007. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2007. ATT 3293220.
- Hana-Kimi*. OneManga. 23 Feb 2009. <<http://forum.onemanga.com/showthread.php?t=19109>>.
- Hatori, Bisco. *Ouran High School Host Club*. Ed. Alvin Lu. Trans. Kenichiro Yagi. 10 vols. to date. San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2005-.
- Helford, Elyce Rae. "Introduction." *Fantasy Girls: Gender in the New Universe of Science Fiction and Fantasy Television*. Ed. Elyce Rae Helford. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2000. 1-12.

- Hibbs, Thomas. "Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Feminist Noir." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Ed. James B. South. Chicago: Open Court, 2003. 49-60.
- Hino, Matsuri. *Vampire Knight*. 5 vols to date. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, 2007-.
- Hoffner, C. "Children's Wishful Identification and Parasocial Interaction with Favorite Television Characters." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. **40** (1996): 389-402.
- IMDb. "Awards for Buffy the Vampire Slayer." 2008. 30 Dec. 2008.
<<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118276/awards>>.
- Kelts, Roland. *Japanamerica*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006.
- Klimmt, Christoph, Tilo Hartmann, Holger Schramm. "Parasocial Interactions and Relationships." *Psychology of Entertainment*. Ed. Jennings Bryant and Peter Vorderer. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2006. 291-314.
- Kraidy, Marwan. *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.
- Like Tohru. Facebook. 23 Feb 2009.
<<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=187703340&ref=ts#/topic.php?uid=2204733203&topic=3991>>.
- Maccoby, E.E. and W.C. Wilson. "Identification and Observational Learning from Films." *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*. **55** (1957): 76-87.
- Magoulick, Mary. "Frustrating Female Heroism: Mixed Messages in *Xena*, *Nikita*, and

Buffy.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*. **39** (2006): 729-755.

Marriot, Michel. “Fighting Women Enter the Arena, No Holds Barred.” *The New York Times*. 15 May 2003. 1 Dec 2008.

<<http://www.si.umich.edu/~rfrost/courses/SI110/readings/Cyberculture/Babe%20fighters%20in%20video%20games.pdf>>.

Masters, Coco. “America Is Drawn to Manga.” *New York Times* 10 Aug. 2006. 14 Sept. 2008.

<<http://www.time.com/time/insidebiz/article/0,9171,1223355,00.html>>.

Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight*. New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2005.

---. *New Moon*. London: Atom, 2006.

---. *Eclipse*. London: Atom, 2007.

---. *Breaking Dawn*. London: Atom, 2008.

Mignolo, Walter D. “Globalization, Civilization Processes, and the Relocation of Languages and Cultures.” *The Cultures of Globalization*. Ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998. 32-53.

Movie Times, The. “Top 100 Top-grossing Movies of All Time.” 7 Jan. 2009.

<<http://www.the-movie-times.com/thrsdir/alltime.mv?domestic+ByDG>>.

Nakajo, Hisaya. *Hana-Kimi: For You in Full Blossom*. Ed. Jason Thompson. Trans. David Ury. 23 vols. San Francisco: VIZ Media, 2004- 2008.

Napier, Susan J. *Anime: from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle, Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Nodelman, P. “The Eye and the I: Identification and First-Person Narratives in Picture

Books. *Children's Literature*. **19** (1991): 1-30.

Ogasawara, Yuko. *Office Ladies and Salaried Men: Power, Gender, and Work in Japanese Companies*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Ouran. OneManga. 23 Feb 2009.

<<http://forum.onemanga.com/showthread.php?t=20910>>.

Owen, Susan. "Vampires, Postmodernity, and Postfeminism: Buffy the Vampire Slayer." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*. **27** (1999): 24-31.

Patten, Fred. *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2004.

Pecora, Norma. "Identity by Design: The Corporate Construction of Teen Romance Novels." *Growing Up Girls: Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*. Ed. Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999. 49-86.

Perfect Man, The. Dir. Mark Rosman. Perf. Hilary Duff, Heather Locklear, Chris North. Universal Studios, 2005.

Perlman, Medora S. "Toward a Theory of the Self in the Group." *Psyche at Work*. Ed. Murray Stein and John Hollwitz. Wilmette, IL: Chiron Publications, 1992. 174-193.

Rimer, Sara. "AMAZING +: Driven to Excel; for Girls, It's Be Yourself, and Be Perfect, Too." *New York Times*. 1 April 2007. 3 Nov 2008.

<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9E03E3DC1E30F932A35757C0A9619C8B63>>.

Ringrose, Jessica and Valerie Walkerdine. "What Does It Mean to Be a Girl in the Twenty-first Century? Exploring Some Contemporary Dilemmas of Femininity and Girlhood in the West." *Girl Culture: an Encyclopedia*. Ed. Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008.

Robert Pattinson. Facebook. 1 Dec 2008.

<<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#/s.php?init=q&q=robert%20pattinson&ref=ts&sid=aafc92bf135818e78571f32eead44fd6&n=1&o=4&k=200000010&sf=t>>.

Ross, Sharon. "Dangerous Demons: Fan Responses to Girls' Power, Girls' Bodies, Girls' Beauty in 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer.'" *Femspec*. 5 (2004): 82-100.

Ross, Sharon Marie and Louisa Ellen Stein. "Watching Teen TV." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008. 3-26.

Rushing, Janice Hocker, Thomas S. Frentz. *Projecting the Shadow: The Cyborg Hero in American Film*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Sakurakoji, Kanoko. *Backstage Prince*. Vol 1-2. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, 2007.

Sato, Barbara. *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in the Interwar Japan*. London: Duke University Press, 2003.

Sax, Leonard. "'Twilight' Sinks Its Teeth into Feminism." *The Washington Post*. 17 August 2008. 1 Dec 2008.

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/us/lnacademic/results/docview/docview.do?docLinkInd=true&risb=21_T5090254484&format=GNBFI&sort>

=RELEVANCE&startDocNo=1&resultsUrlKey=29_T5090243561&cisb=22_T5090254487&treeMax=true&treeWidth=0&csi=8075&docNo=1>.

Scanlon, Jennifer. "Boys-R-Us." *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*. Ed. Sherrie Inness. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Scelfo, Julie. "Bad Girls Go Wild" *Newsweek*. U.S. Edition. 13 June 2005. 12 Nov 2008.

<http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/us/lnacademic/returnTo.do?returnToKey=20_T5145410102>.

Schodt, Frederik L. *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*. Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 1996.

---. *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1983.

Secret Life of the American Teenager, The. Dir. Brenda Hampton. ABC Family Original Series. Episode 1.

Seymour, Lesley Jane. "Tweens 'R' Shoppers." *The New York Times*. 22 April 2007. December 1, 2008.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/22/nyregion/nyregionspecial2/22RSHOP.html?scp=1&sq=tweens%20r%20shoppers&st=cse>>.

Sheridan-Rabideau, Mary. *Girls, Feminism, and Grassroots Literacies: Activism in the GirlZone*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.

Shiokawa, Kanako. "Cute but Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics."

- Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*. Ed John A. Lent. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999.
- Shojo Beat*. Ed. Marc Weidenbaum, Megan Bates, Grant Lowery, Joy J. Ma. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, **4.2** (2008).
- Shojo Beat Media Kit*. VIZmedia.
<http://www.shojobeat.com/mediakit/SB_Media_Kit_2008.pdf>. April 18, 2008.
- Singhal, Arvind and Everett M. Rogers. *Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy for Social Change*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1999.
- Singhal, Arvind and Kant Udonpim. "Cultural Shareability, Archetypes and Television Soaps: 'Oshindrome' in Thailand." *Gazette*. **59.3** (1997): 171-188.
- Sloop, John. *Disciplining Gender: Rhetorics of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2004.
- Something About Shojo*. Time Magazine. Aug. 10, 2006. 8 September 2006.
<<http://www.time.com/time/buisness/article/0,8599,1225166,00.html>>.
- Svenkerud, Peer J. and Rita L. Rahoi, and Arvind Singhal. "Incorporating Ambiguity and Archetypes in Entertainment-Education Programming: Lessons Learned from *Oshin*." *Gazette*. **55** (1995): 147-168.
- Sweeney, Kathleen. *Maiden USA: Girl Icons Come of Age*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Takaya, Natsuki. *Fruits Basket*. 22 vols to date. Front cover. Los Angeles, CA: Tokyopop, 2004-.

Things I Learnt. Facebook. 23 Feb 2009.

<<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=187703340&ref=ts#/topic.php?uid=2204733203&topic=3500>>.

Vampire Knight. OneManga. 23 Feb 2009.

<<http://forum.onemanga.com/showthread.php?t=21867>>.

W Juliet. Tokyopop. 23 Feb 2009.

<<http://messageboard.tokyopop.com/forums/showthread.php?t=48>>.

Walsh, Jennifer L. and L. Monique Ward. "Adolescent Gender Role Portrayals in the Media: 1950 to the Present." *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*. Ed. Patrick E. Jamieson and Daniel Romer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Watase, Yuu. *Absolute Boyfriend*. 6 vols to date. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, 2006-
---. *Imadoki!* 5 vols. San Francisco: Viz Media LLC, 2004-2005.

Wells, Kimberly Ann. *Screaming, Flying, and Laughing: Magical Feminism's Witches in Contemporary Film, Television, and Novels*. Diss. Texas A&M University, 2007. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2007. ATT 3270842.

Wright, Bradford, W. *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Supplementary Sources Consulted

Allen, Paula Gunn. *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and*

- Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989.
- Allison, Anne. *Permitted and Prohibited Desires: Mothers, Comics and Censorship in Japan*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.
- Kinsella, Sharon. "Pro-Establishment Manga: Pop-culture and the Balance of Power in Japan." *Media, Culture & Society*. **21** (1999): 567-572.
- Lawrence, John and Robert Jewett. *The Myth of the American Superhero*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Lent, John A. *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999.
- Levine, M. and L. Miya-Jervis. "Where the Wiccans Are." *Bitch*, **12** (2000): 63.
- Miller, Jessica Prata. "'The I in Team': Buffy and Feminist Ethics." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Ed. James B. South. Chicago: Open Court, 2003. 35-49.
- Millett, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1970.
- Nayak, Anoop and Mary Jane Kehily. *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities*. New York: Palgrave, 2008.
- Osterheldt, Jenee. "Girls in Pop Culture Are Saving the Day." *Chicago Tribune*. 18 Aug 2004. 2 Jan 2008.
- <<http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy.tamu.edu:2048/pqdweb?did=679876671&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=2945&RQT=309&VName=PQD>>.
- Radway, Janice. *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature*.

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Stroman, Carolyn A. and Jannette L. Dates. "African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans in the Media." *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*. Ed. Patrick E. Jamieson and Daniel Romer. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Wee, Valerie. "Teen Television and the WB Television Network." *Teen Television: Essays on Programming and Fandom*. Ed. Sharon Marie Ross and Louisa Ellen Stein. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2008. 43-60.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY FIGURES

Table A-1

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.305	.234		5.586	.000
Select your Gender	.088	.078	.061	1.120	.263
Created: Current Age	-.003	.005	-.036	-.567	.571
Years to date of watching	.003	.007	.031	.492	.623
How often do you watch/read?	.090	.031	.168	2.901	.004
Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.000	-.122	-2.239	.026
How knowledgeable are you?	.078	.045	.102	1.735	.084

a. Dependent Variable: Parasocial Relationship Maintenance

Table A-2

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Parasocial Maintenance	1.7548	.62850	332
Parasocial Emotions	2.0852	.67459	332
Wishful Identification	2.5216	.86781	336
Direct Imitation	3.3833	1.14622	331
Prefer Shojo to General	1.9502	.64641	312
Prefer Shojo to Fantasy	2.1924	.76355	280
Gender	1.75	.434	332
Current Age	25.69	7.535	332
Number of Years watching	11.92	6.108	332
Heavy/Light Involvement	2.57	1.175	332
Minutes per Day	108.30	98.830	332
Knowledgeable Level	2.40	.818	332

Table A-3

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1					
(Constant)	1.625	.253		6.418	.000
Select your Gender	.015	.085	.010	.174	.862
Created: Current Age	.005	.006	.054	.838	.403
Years to date of watching	.006	.007	.050	.783	.434
How often do you watch/read?	.089	.034	.156	2.658	.008
Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.000	-.104	-1.884	.060
How knowledgeable are you?	.038	.049	.046	.785	.433

a. Dependent Variable: Parasocial Relationship Emotional Responses

Table A-4
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.824	.305		5.976	.000
Select your Gender	-.277	.103	-.139	-2.692	.007
Created: Current Age	.025	.007	.214	3.539	.000
Years to date of watching	.002	.009	.012	.201	.841
How often do you watch/read?	.141	.041	.191	3.450	.001
Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.000	-.060	-1.160	.247
How knowledgeable are you?	.091	.059	.086	1.542	.124

a. Dependent Variable: Wishful Identification

Table A-5
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.922	.430		4.475	.000
Select your Gender	.179	.145	.067	1.238	.217
Created: Current Age	.014	.010	.090	1.381	.168
Years to date of watching	.005	.012	.025	.382	.703
How often do you watch/read?	.137	.057	.141	2.422	.016
Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.001	-.038	-.685	.494
How knowledgeable are you?	.179	.083	.127	2.152	.032

a. Dependent Variable: Direct Imitation

Table A-6
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.363	.243		5.600	.000
Select your Gender	.158	.082	.105	1.925	.055
Created: Current Age	-.004	.005	-.048	-.755	.451
Years to date of watching	.008	.007	.079	1.223	.222
How often do you watch/read?	.155	.032	.283	4.862	.000
Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.000	-.117	-2.122	.035
How knowledgeable are you?	-.003	.047	-.003	-.053	.958

a. Dependent Variable: Prefer Shojo to General Girlhood Media

Table A-7

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.073	.308	3.486	.001
	Select your Gender	.242	.107	.132	.025
	Created: Current Age	.000	.007	-.003	.961
	Years to date of watching	.018	.008	.143	.035
	How often do you watch/read?	.135	.041	.206	.001
	Minutes/day on average shojo day	.000	.000	-.062	.292
	How knowledgeable are you?	.082	.059	.087	.168

a. Dependent Variable: Prefer Shojo to Fantasy Girlhood Media

APPENDIX B

CHARACTER CHARTS

Hana-Kimi Character List

Heroine	Mizuki – cross-dresses
Hero	Sano – the high-jumper Mizuki moved to Japan to meet; he knows Mizuki is a girl
Love Rival	Nakatsu – he thinks Mizuki is a boy and loves her/him
Side Characters	Dr. Umeda – the gay doctor who mentors Mizuki
	Class Mates – their friends and confidants

W Juliet Character List

Heroine	Ito – Occasionally mistaken for a boy
Hero	Makoto – cross-dresses; originally mistakes Ito for a boy
Love Rival(s)	Various characters – Ito’s old friends and new classmates

Ouran Character List

Heroine	Haruhi – originally mistaken for a boy, later forced to cross-dress
Hero	Tamaki – originally mistakes Haruhi for a boy
Love Rival(s)	The Host Club – primarily the Twins and Kyoya, who know Haruhi is a girl and develop feelings for her
	Kasanoda – who has a crush on her before discovering she is a girl
The Host Club	Tamaki – the King of the Host Club who originally befriended the members
	Kyoya – the sly vice-president; he is a dark figure with a troubled past
	The Twins: Hikaru and Kaoru – mischievous boys who antagonize Tamaki, vie for Haruhi’s affection, and maintain a farcical homosexual relationship with each other. Hikaru is particularly in love with Haruhi.
	Hunny – a high school senior who appears child-like. An emphatically cute character who has a close relationship with Mori
	Mori – a mostly silent character who understands his life as a responsibility to care for Hunny.

Side Characters	Haruhi's father – a bisexual man who professionally cross-dresses
	The Zuko Club – an all-girls, lesbian club from a rival school who try to get Haruhi to join them. They are a mock representation of the non-lesbian, real-world theater troupe, the Takarazuka Revue Company.

VITA

Sarah Kornfield received her Bachelor of Arts degree in communication and in English from Wheaton College in 2007. She entered the Communication program at Texas A&M University in August 2007 and received her Master of Arts degree in May 2009. Her research interests include gender relations, popular culture, girlhood and intercultural entertainment. She plans to pursue a doctoral degree in communication and her long term goals are to pursue a career in scholarship and academia, further researching communication with critical attention to issues of sexism and racism in entertainment media

Ms. Kornfield may be reached at the Department of Communication, Texas A&M University 4234, College Station, TX 77840-4234. Her email is Sarah.Kornfield@gmail.com.